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MESSY CHURCH: GROWING MISSIONAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH
MULTIGENERATIONAL WORSHIP AND LEARNING

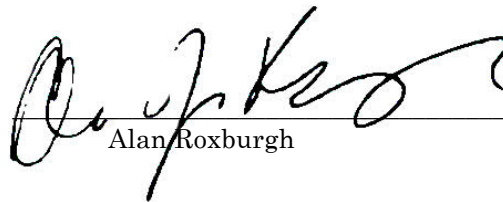
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JUDY PAULSEN

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requirements for the degree of

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Alan Roxburgh



Kurt Fredrickson

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MESSY CHURCH: GROWING MISSIONAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH
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A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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ABSTRACT

Messy Church: Growing Missional Connections through Multigenerational Worship and Learning

Judy Paulsen

Doctor of Ministry

School of theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2012

The goal of this study was to evaluate the multigenerational worship and learning experience called Messy Church. This was done in order to discern if this new form of church could enable an established parish to reach de-churched and non-churched people. The primary research questions addressed who attends Messy Church, why they attend, and what effect their participation is having on the development of their faith.

Results of the study showed that Messy Church has enabled the Anglican parish of Christ Memorial Church, Oshawa, to re-connect with de-churched people and to connect with non-churched people. It was found that two primary age groups attended Messy Church. These were young parents with children and young grandparents with grandchildren. While the grandparents largely were church-attending grandmothers, the young parents primarily were marginally attending, de-churched, or non-churched mothers and fathers. The majority of children participating in Messy Church were non-churched.

Results indicated that families attending did so primarily because they wanted to teach their children key stories from the Bible. Main attractors included the multigenerational and participatory nature of the experience and the multi-sensory format. Analysis of attendance records indicated significant growth since the inauguration of Messy Church. This analysis also revealed that the majority of participants were regular in their attendance.

The study demonstrated that as a result of participating in Messy Church a majority of families experienced increases in several Christian behaviors. These included knowing the Bible, worshipping God, talking with their children about God, and praying together. Results also showed that due to additional support and resources, parents and grandparents felt better equipped to serve as the Christian educators of their children and grandchildren. Implications for future praxis in missional settings were discussed. These included implications for worship, discipleship, Christian education, and church planting in a post-Christendom context.

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To Pat

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
 PART ONE: THE MINISTRY CHALLENGE	
Chapter 1. THE MISSIONAL CONTEXT OF OSHAWA, ONTARIO	7
Chapter 2. A PROFILE OF CHRIST MEMORIAL CHURCH	22
 PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION	
Chapter 3. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	51
Chapter 4. LITURGICAL FRAMEWORKS AND MISSION	71
 PART THREE: THE MINISTRY STRATEGY	
Chapter 5. A DESCRIPTION OF MESSY CHURCH	96
Chapter 6. THE EVALUATIVE METHOD	118
Chapter 7. A PROFILE OF MESSY CHURCH FAMILIES	134
Chapter 8. GROWING MISSIONAL CONNECTIONS	156
Chapter 9. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRAXIS	176
 CONCLUSION	192
APPENDIX	197
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199

INTRODUCTION

These are unsettling times for the Church in North America and indeed throughout what was once Western Christendom. Significant cultural changes are underway. This requires the Church to recognize and adapt to the challenging new context in which it finds itself. The cultural context is still in transition, so adapting to it is particularly difficult.

One of the evident cultural changes is a breakdown of traditional religious practices. Multiple, complex factors—such as the secularization of society, the privatization of religious beliefs, and changes in leisure and employment patterns—have resulted in a steady decline in church participation. This trend is perhaps most obvious among the children of longtime (and now elderly) church members who raised their families during the 1950s and 1960s. Although taught the Christian story and beliefs in their childhood, many of these people no longer participate in church in any meaningful sense. They fall into the growing ranks of de-churched adults, and their own children and grandchildren are completely non-churched.¹ Christendom, which gave privilege and power to the Church in North America and Western Europe, is in its death-throws. With many congregations gasping their last breath, the remaining churches are largely in a state of shock, grief, or panic.

Churches in post-Christendom contexts, such as North America, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, and New Zealand, face challenges in adapting to this new

¹ Working Group of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2007), 37.

context. As Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky explain in *Leadership on the Line*, adaptive challenges are “problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures.”² As these authors suggest, such problems require new ideas, experimentation, and modifications. The key adaptive challenges for churches in post-Christendom contexts are to re-connect with de-churched people and to connect with non-churched people. These are daunting goals, especially for pastors and congregations who have not been equipped to function in any environment other than Christendom. In that context, their primary role was to nurture and care for their particular segment of a predominantly Christian society. Many such churches now struggle with how to adapt to the new context in which Christians exist as a minority. They are confronted with perplexing choices about how to proceed in ministry.

Many congregations see primarily two choices. One option is to keep on doing what they always have done, with the hope of remaining steadfastly faithful. Another option is to adopt elements of the surrounding culture, with the hope of becoming more relevant. However, in such tumultuous times, there is great uncertainty about how to proceed. As congregations watch their numbers dwindle and their once solid denominational structures falter, many faithful Christians ask, “What does it mean to be the Church in times such as these?”

² Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13.

One adaptation seen in both the United Kingdom and Canada is the Fresh Expressions movement.³ With its origins in the Church of England and British Methodism, this movement encourages experimental and contextually specific forms of church. Now spreading across the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the Fresh Expressions movement has given rise to forms of church that may seem curious and strange when compared to traditional worship. For example, it has included the development of skateboard churches, Goth Eucharists, café churches, pub churches, workplace cell churches, and even bakery churches. As a multigenerational worship and learning experience involving Bible stories, songs, games, crafts, and often food, Messy Church is another of the many developments within the Fresh Expressions movement.⁴

The movement as a whole, and Messy Church as one of its forms, is still in a dynamic phase of growth and change. Serious research on the actual praxis of Messy Church and the effect it has as a new form of evangelism, discipleship training, and worship is presently non-existent. Research is needed regarding who attends these Messy Church gatherings and what effect it has in the participants' lives. It would be especially helpful to know if this multigenerational worship and learning experience enables established congregations to connect with de-churched and non-churched people. The possible avenues for research are many. Apart from anecdotal accounts, no serious qualitative analysis of Messy Church has been done.

³ Working Group of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-Shaped Church*, 7-23.

⁴ Lucy Moore, *Messy Church: Fresh Ideas for Building a Christ-Centered Community* (Abingdon, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2006), 9-11.

Using tools of practical theology, including qualitative research, this paper will explore the praxis of Messy Church within the context of one congregation. It will show it to be effective in growing significant connections with de-churched and non-churched people across a variety of age groups. Qualitative analysis of personal interviews and questionnaires, together with quantitative measures examining such things as attendance patterns, will form the primary data for this research. Analysis of this data will be based on a framework of Christian conversion that assumes changes in people's spiritual beliefs, in their behavior, and in belonging to a faith community.⁵

This analysis of belief, behavior, and belonging in turn will enable an evaluation of the type of connections forming with the families participating in Messy Church. A missional connection is one that draws people into a deeper understanding of and relationship with the calling and sending Triune God, thereby enabling them to participate in the *Missio Dei*, the Mission of God in the world.⁶ The present research demonstrates that Messy Church is having such an effect on its participants. A full picture of the foundations, scope, and effects of this ministry will unfold through the three main sections of this paper.

Part One will examine the context in which this ministry developed, including a demographic analysis of the community and church. Changing frameworks within the

⁵ Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 22.

⁶ George R. Hunsberger, "Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 82.

Anglican congregation and their relevance to the missional life of their church will be studied. The initial impetus for developing Messy Church also will be discussed.

Part Two will explore relevant biblical and theological themes related to the practical theology of engaging non-churched and de-churched families through a non-traditional worship and learning experience. Anglican liturgical practices and their connection to ecclesiology and mission will be considered. New developments in mission across the Anglican Communion, as related to Messy Church, will be explored.

Part Three of the paper will offer a detailed description of Messy Church as it occurs in the particular ministry context of Christ Memorial Church in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. It also will describe the research method and tools used in this qualitative analysis. Demographics of the families attending, and their past or present connections (or lack of connections) with the broader Christian Church, will be presented. The missional connections developing with these families will be explored by studying how their participation in Messy Church has affected their identity as people of faith and how it has changed parents' and grandparents' roles as spiritual educators of their children. Transformations in the behavior of these families in terms of worship, prayer, and knowledge of Scripture will be examined. This study also will investigate how their involvement in Messy Church has changed their sense of belonging to the congregation of Christ Church, Oshawa, and to the broader Church. Finally, implications for new praxis arising from the present praxis of Messy Church will be extrapolated. These implications include new forms of evangelism, worship, discipleship training, church planting, and the Christian education of children.

PART ONE

THE MINISTRY CHALLENGE

CHAPTER 1

THE MISSIONAL CONTEXT OF OSHAWA, ONTARIO.

The present study was conducted in Oshawa, a Canadian city situated on the outskirts of a major metropolis. The city's geographic location as well as its socio-economic, political, and religious history all significantly impact the ministry of churches located there. In addition to each of these factors, this study will examine financial priorities, educational and occupational data, and relational connectedness within the community. Finally, cultural and sub-cultural influences will be explored, in order to build a rich profile of the ministry context as it relates to one particular congregation.

The History and Demographics of the City

The city of Oshawa describes itself today as the “eastern gateway to the Greater Toronto Area and a provincially recognized urban growth center.”¹ It is situated on the northern shore of Lake Ontario, about sixty kilometers east of Toronto. As of 2011, it has a population of approximately 152,000.² The city is included in “the Canadian Business

¹ City of Oshawa, “Business Development: Oshawa Overview,” http://www.oshawa.ca/eco_dev/bus_serv.asp (accessed June 2, 2011).

² Ibid.

magazine's list of top 40 locations in Canada to do business,"³ largely due to the excellent transportation links it offers through its harbor, highways, and railway connections. The transportation of people and goods is central to this city's very identity and existence.

From its earliest beginnings Oshawa has been a center of transportation and trade. The first settlement developed from a fur-trading post established by French traders in the 1700s. The word "Oshawa" comes from an Ojibwa term meaning "point of crossing, where the canoe is exchanged for the trail."⁴ Throughout the early 1800s, a large number of immigrants flowed into the area. Many were United Empire Loyalists, who left the United States in order to remain under British rule. With increased trade and industrialization came further immigration—principally from Ireland, England, and French Canada. The village of Oshawa was incorporated in 1850; and in 1853 the Grand Trunk Railroad, which extended from Montreal to Toronto, established an Oshawa station. In 1853, the Port of Oshawa also was officially established.⁵ With increased access by rail and by water, Oshawa continued to grow.

In 1876 Robert McLaughlin, an established builder of carriages, relocated to Oshawa to take advantage of the transportation services that were available. This company flourished into the largest carriage works in the British Empire.⁶ In 1907 this

³ Ibid.

⁴ City of Oshawa, "A Brief History of the City of Oshawa," <http://www.oshawa.ca/tourism/history3.asp> (accessed June 2, 2011).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

company began manufacturing cars, and in 1918 the McLaughlin Motor Car Company merged with the Chevrolet Motor Car Company of Canada to create General Motors of Canada.⁷ This company has remained a major employer and influence throughout the history of Oshawa until the present day.

Throughout the first decade of the 1900s a public water supply system was constructed, sewer mains were built, and land was purchased for the first public library. In 1910 the Oshawa General Hospital was founded, and the following year streets began to be paved. Throughout this period both the population and business development continued to expand.⁸ Oshawa's growth was strengthened further by being served by the main lines of the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National railways.⁹ As a primary means of transportation at that time, these railways brought many goods and people to the city and provided a means for businesses to transport their products to wider markets.

In 1924, with a population of 16,659, the town of Oshawa was awarded city status. In 1967, dredging of the Oshawa harbor allowed the city to benefit from the international transport of goods through the Great Lakes via the recently opened St. Lawrence Seaway. Such commodities as steel, salt, sugar, and fertilizer now passed through the Oshawa harbor. At this time the City of Oshawa Marine Rescue Association (COMRA) was established to patrol a major section of Lake Ontario. This rescue unit still operates out of the port today, offering added security to both recreational and commercial boaters.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Oshawa's history as a center of transportation, trade, and manufacturing not only has had a strong impact on its economic development but also has shaped its political identity. During the years of most rapid growth in the Canadian automotive industry, the city was known for a strong union presence and socialist politics. Trade and industrial unions formed during the 1920s and grew in influence and power during the Great Depression.

In 1937, the first contract between General Motors and its workers was signed as a direct result of a local body of the United Auto Workers being organized in Oshawa.¹⁰ This contract brought an end to one of the most bitter labor disputes in the history of Ontario. With unions still very much resisted in the upper echelons of political power in that period, the Premier of Ontario (Mitch Hepburn) ordered the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and an additional armed militia be sent to Oshawa to suppress demonstrations by the strikers.¹¹ Although no serious violence erupted, this action deepened union resolve and public support for unions for decades to come.

The strong support for organized labor and socialist politics carried into the decades of economic expansion which followed World War II. This support was reflected in the city's broad support for the federal New Democratic Party (NDP) across several decades. Ed Broadbent, the leader of the New Democratic Party, served as the minister of Parliament for Oshawa at the federal level from 1968 to 1989.

¹⁰ Canadian Auto Workers Local 222, "History of the CAW Local 222," <http://www.cawlocal.ca/222/history.asp> (accessed September 1, 2011).

¹¹ Ibid.

Through the late 1990s, as the city began to experience economic diversification and attract more commuters, the city's political climate began to change. Tougher election battles were fought among all the major federal and provincial parties. Since 2004 the city has been represented by Dr. Colin Carrie, a member of the federal Conservative Party in the Canadian House of Commons. While a union presence remains strong in Oshawa the politics of the city, like its economic base, have diversified.

Throughout the past two decades, the city of Oshawa has continued to experience population growth. This is particularly true in the more affluent suburban neighborhoods in the northern sections, where many commuters have bought homes. GO Transit commuter trains connect Oshawa westward with Toronto, Oakville, Burlington, and Hamilton. Via Rail, which offers long-distance passenger train service along the Quebec City to Windsor railway corridor, also has a station in Oshawa. This offers eastbound commuters from Oshawa daily rail access to such places as Cobourg, Belleville, and Kingston. Highway 401 runs through the heart of the city, linking Oshawa to Toronto and Hamilton to the west and Kingston and Ottawa to the east. By 2015 Highway 407 will extend across the top of the city, providing key connections to the northern regions of the Greater Toronto Area to the west and to the city of Peterborough to the east.

Today Oshawa is also a major center for post-secondary education. Durham College, The University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT), and an extension site of Trent University are located in Oshawa. The student population of the city is expected to grow substantially over the next two decades. UOIT recently has expanded, establishing campus buildings in the heart of the downtown core. The Faculty of

Criminology and Justice Studies will be housed in what was originally a vaudeville theatre in the 1920s. Student housing in the downtown will be provided through the renovation of the large Genosha Hotel, also built in the 1920s. Other revitalization projects in the downtown core include the recent construction of the General Motors Centre sports and entertainment complex as well as an extensive YMCA recreational facility in the heart of the city.

Oshawa also has become a major center for health care in the Durham Region of Ontario. In 2010 a new cancer treatment center was added to the site of what was the original Oshawa General Hospital (now Lakeridge Health, Oshawa). The existence of this facility now means that patients from the entire Durham region no longer need to travel into the heart of Toronto to receive treatment for cancer but come to Oshawa instead. As a result, the new facility has attracted health care professionals of many disciplines to the city.

In addition to expanded health care services, Oshawa offers many services targeted at retirees. There are three senior citizen centers located around the city which offer recreational and educational opportunities. There are also numerous housing options for senior citizens in the form of assisted-living apartment buildings, retirement homes, and full-support nursing homes. With a cost of living that is lower than most parts of the greater Toronto area, Oshawa attracts retirees to the city.

Results of the 2006 Census reveal that residents of Oshawa are overwhelmingly English speaking (94 percent), with a median age of 39.4 years, which is slightly lower than the provincial average. The population is of a predominantly Caucasian background,

with aboriginal people comprising only 1.7 percent of the population and visible minorities as a whole comprising only 8 percent of the residents. About 12 percent of the city's residents are foreign-born (compared to 50 percent in the city of Toronto). The median annual income earned by persons fifteen years of age and over, is approximately \$2,000 above the provincial average.¹² So as a whole Oshawa is somewhat younger, more homogenous, and slightly wealthier than the provincial average.

The religious makeup of Oshawa has changed dramatically over its history. In 1869 the religious profile of Oshawa residents was recorded as entirely Christian. At that time the most predominant Christian denominations were Wesleyan Methodists (22 percent), Church of England (20 percent), Presbyterian (15 percent), Roman Catholic (15 percent), and Bible Christian (8 percent).¹³ At this time, most people in the city would have walked or traveled a short distance to attend church. Since there were few recreational activities offered on Sundays and virtually no businesses were open, attending a Sunday worship service was the cultural norm. With a relatively small number of denominations present, and virtually no other faith groups existing in Oshawa, churches were well attended and expanded as the city grew.

The religious profile of present-day Oshawa, as reported in the 2001 Canadian Census, indicates the following makeup: Roman Catholic (30 percent), no religion (18 percent), United Church (17.7 percent), Anglican (15.5 percent), and other Protestant (2.5

¹² Statistics Canada, "2006 Community Profiles," <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3518013&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=oshaw&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=35&B1=All&Custom=> (accessed June 21, 2011)

¹³ Oshawa Public Libraries, "Genealogy and Local History: The Religious Makeup of Oshawa 1869 and 2001—A Comparison," <http://shlibgenealogyhistory.wordpress.com/2009/05/06/34/> (accessed June 21, 2011).

percent). Although Oshawa is still predominantly a city claiming a Christian identity (78 percent),¹⁴ this figure does not accurately reflect actual church attendance or involvement. The increase of people in Oshawa claiming no religion (now the second largest group) reflects the growing secularization seen across Canadian society as a whole. The increasing diversification of denominations seen across Canada is also evident today in Oshawa, which is now home to the national body of The Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canada and many independent or denominational church plants meeting in school auditoriums and cafeterias.

With little or no cultural pressure to attend a church, and many options for recreational activities on Sundays, church attendance is in decline across denominations in the city. The increased numbers of people working on Sundays, across almost every sector of society, also has contributed to this decline. Whereas in the 1990s there were five Anglican churches in Oshawa, there are now four. In late 2010 two churches belonging to the United Church of Canada also closed their doors. Congregants now attend one of the three remaining United Churches in the city. In the spring of 2011 it was announced that three of the Presbyterian churches in Oshawa would amalgamate. While there has definitely been growth in the variety of denominations operating in Oshawa, many of those denominations are experiencing challenging times.

Socio-economic Challenges Facing the City

Like many other cities in Canada, Oshawa's socio-economic challenges became more evident during the recent global recession of 2008 and 2009. Both government and

¹⁴ Ibid.

charitable social service agencies who offer support and services to the poor and marginalized found themselves severely stretched. This was evident across many venues as agencies struggled to serve more people with the same or fewer resources. For example, demand on local foods banks increased by 15 percent over this period.¹⁵

As the largest urban center in the provincial region of Durham, many of the social challenges apparent in the city were highlighted in a brief prepared in 2009 by the Durham Economic Downturn Task Force. This paper reported that the Durham Children's Aid had experienced a 15 percent increase in new investigations during the recession and that the Catholic Family Services of Durham Region experienced a 24 percent rise in requests for services in the area of family violence treatment counseling over a similar two-year period prior to the recession.¹⁶

Issues of drug and alcohol addiction, drug-related crime, and child neglect or abandonment surface particularly in the pockets of urban poverty in Oshawa. These areas are located most prominently in the southern section of the city bordered by Highway 401 and Lake Ontario. Other pockets of poverty include several areas of the downtown core and a concentration of subsidized housing in the north along Nonquon and Pentland Avenues. People affected by poverty, addiction, and violence are helped by federally and provincially funded agencies such as the Social Services Department of Durham Region,

¹⁵ Durham Economic Downturn Task Force, *The Unraveling of Ontario's Social Safety Net* (Durham, ON: Durham Economic Downturn Task Force, February 2009), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

the Durham Children's Aid Society, the Oshawa Community Health Centre, and the Canadian Mental Health Association.¹⁷

There are also several key Christian ministries in Oshawa that provide care and support to people facing serious social challenges. Gate 3:16 is a drop-in and resource center for adults living on the street or in rooming houses in the downtown core of the city.¹⁸ The Refuge is a drop-in and resource locale serving at-risk youth in Oshawa.¹⁹ Both agencies provide their clients with a safe and welcoming place during cold weather; emergency clothing; nutritious food; personal hygiene supplies; referral for emergency housing; and various forms of vocational, mental health, and spiritual counseling. These ministries receive their funding from many churches in the city as well as several civic organizations.

Other key Christian organizations addressing social challenges in Oshawa include St. Vincent's Kitchen and Simcoe Hall Settlement House Food Bank, which provide daily hot meals;²⁰ The Denise House, an emergency shelter for women; Cornerstone Men's Hostel, which provides emergency overnight housing for men;²¹ and Feed the

¹⁷ Durham Region: Social Services, <http://www.informdurham.com/record/OSH0558> (accessed October 17, 2011); Durham Children's Aid Society, <http://www.durhamcas.ca> (accessed October 17, 2011); Oshawa Community Health Centre, <http://www.oshc.ca> (accessed October 17, 2011); Canadian Mental Health Association <http://www.cmha.ca> (accessed October 17, 2011).

¹⁸ Gate 3:16, <http://www.gate3-16.bravehost.com/> (accessed October 17, 2011).

¹⁹ The Refuge, <http://www.refugeoutreach.com/> (accessed October 17, 2011).

²⁰ St. Vincent's Kitchen, <http://www.stvincentskitchen.com> (accessed October 17, 2011); Simcoe Hall Settlement House Food Bank, <http://www.simcoehall.com> (accessed October 17, 2011).

²¹ The Denise House, <http://www.thedenisehouse.com> (accessed October 17, 2011); Cornerstone Men's Hostel, <http://ohhaonline.ca/cornerstone.htm> (accessed October 17, 2011).

Need, another local food bank.²² In addition to these organizations, Luke's Place offers legal support for women in abusive relationships, and Rose of Durham provides parenting support and resources to young single parents.²³ Local churches from across a wide range of denominations actively support these ministries as well with both volunteers and funds.

Economic Ups and Downs of the City

Throughout most of its history Oshawa has enjoyed a relatively stable economy. Apart from an eighteen-day strike in 1937 by four thousand assembly line workers at General Motors,²⁴ the city has maintained relatively stable employment even during the serious Depression of the 1930s. The growing demand for automobiles across North America, particularly following World War II, resulted in vibrant economic growth for most of the city's history. General Motors (GM) was a large and established manufacturer. Many people could not imagine this company, or the city within which it operated, becoming financially vulnerable.

However, like many cities reliant on the automotive industry, the city of Oshawa went through a time of exceptional economic challenge during the 2008-2009 global recession. The automotive sector was hit hard. General Motors Canada closed its Oshawa truck plant in early 2009 and severely reduced shifts at its car plant. From 2005 to 2009 the number of GM employees in Oshawa dropped from thirteen thousand to seven

²² Feed the Need, <http://www.feedtheneed.org> (accessed October 17, 2011).

²³ Luke's Place, <http://www.lukesplace.ca/index.htm> (accessed October 17, 2011); Rose of Durham, <http://www.roseofdurham.com> (accessed October 17, 2011).

²⁴ Canadian Auto Workers Union Local 222, "History of CAW Local 222."

thousand.²⁵ With unemployment soaring during this period, foreclosures on mortgages were at an all-time high; and “foreclosure tours” were being offered to people, hoping to make a profitable investment by buying a repossessed home.

Within the last two years the economic status of Oshawa has taken a more positive turn with an upturn in sales of the Camaro, a model produced by GM at its Oshawa car plant. General Motors Canada now has repaid its recessionary loans from the federal and provincial governments and is on a more stable financial footing. Laid-off assembly line workers are being rehired. It was announced in the spring of 2011 that a new model GM vehicle would be produced at GM’s Oshawa car plant. Although General Motors’ economic role has diminished somewhat in the life of the city as a whole, it remains Oshawa’s largest local employer.

Economic growth for the Durham Region, including Oshawa, now is projected to be higher than the national average during the next few years.²⁶ The economic pendulum has started to swing back from the negative side. Despite this more recent economic optimism, young families increasingly find they require two incomes due to declining job security, the increasing cost of commuting, and high debt levels. While there is optimism about the economic future of Oshawa, that optimism is guarded.

The city’s economic goals include further diversification through continued development in the education and health care sectors. It also anticipates growth in sustainable energy, bioscience, and agriculture. The unemployment rate is expected to

²⁵ Durham Economic Downturn Task Force, *The Unraveling of Ontario’s Social Safety Net*, 2.

²⁶ Cristal Crimi, “Optimism Surrounds Oshawa’s Economy,” Durham Region, <http://www.durhamregion.com/news/business/article/1010996--optimism-surrounds-oshawa-s-economy> (accessed June 2, 2011).

decline further, although it is estimated not to drop below the 8 percent level.²⁷ Just as the Canadian economy as a whole is transitioning to become less focused on manufacturing and more focused on skills, services, and knowledge-based industries, Oshawa's economy also is changing. The city already has begun to shift from very heavily depending on the auto sector to a more diversified economy that includes education, health care, and information technologies.

A Changing Identity: From GM Town to Commuter City

Throughout most of its history Oshawa's economy and identity were linked strongly to its biggest employer, General Motors of Canada. With various manufacturing sites throughout Oshawa, GM workers lived and worked within the city or the immediately surrounding area. Many remaining residents of Oshawa were employed in businesses related to the auto sector. The city was not only home but also workplace to a large percentage of its population. With General Motors offering healthy wage and benefit packages, many residents of Oshawa did not need to look farther afield for employment throughout most of the twentieth century. This situation has changed dramatically over the past two decades.

The 2006 Canadian Census has revealed that residents of Oshawa now have the highest median commute distance in Canada, followed by people living in Toronto, Barrie, Hamilton, Calgary, Montreal, and Ottawa.²⁸ With housing costs soaring across the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Statistics Canada, "Commuting Patterns and Places of Work of Canadians, 2006 Census: Highlights," <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-561/p2-eng.cfm> (accessed June 2, 2011).

Greater Toronto Area, Oshawa still offers relatively affordable housing for families. New housing starts, made up of predominantly single detached houses, are spreading across the north of Oshawa and expanding into land once reserved for agriculture. By 2006, 32.6 percent of workers living in Oshawa were commuting at least twenty-five kilometers to work.²⁹

This shift in workplace location has resulted in significant changes to the length of people's workday, the amount of time families are apart, and the length of time children are in daycare. This in turn has placed more of a burden on weekends as the time when banking is done, groceries are bought, and children are taken to music and dance and sporting events. It also means that families are less willing to spend time apart on weekends, since they have so little time together during the busy work week.

With more people commuting longer distances to get to work there is also increasing fragmentation within the community. With people working outside the community and spending more of their day commuting, there is less time spent with people in their neighborhood. Particularly in the suburban neighborhoods of central and north Oshawa, it is now common for people to have little or no interaction with their neighbors. The societal change of more people commuting significant distances to get to their places of employment has changed the fabric of people's everyday lives significantly.

Key changes in the demographic make-up of Oshawa over its history have been profiled here. These changes are not isolated to the city of Oshawa but are a reflection of shifts in Canadian society as a whole. Religious affiliation and denominational loyalty are

²⁹ Ibid.

declining as society is becoming more secular. Church attendance is dropping as more people work on Sundays or adopt a more privatized religion. Families spend less time together as they must commute farther for employment purposes. Manufacturing industries are giving way to more knowledge- and service-based industries. This often results in fewer unionized, wage-protected jobs. Together with increasing housing costs, this is giving rise to greater financial uncertainty, growing personal debt levels, and more families requiring two incomes.

These societal shifts affect the way people respond to the ministry of Canadian churches. Social, economic, and religious changes in the culture mean fewer people are likely to be in church on any given Sunday or even to have any church connection. Those that are present may be less regular in attendance due to these same forces. With fewer people deeply connected to a church, fewer people know the basic Christian story or anything at all about the Bible. A large percentage of the population has no idea how Christian beliefs and practices can bring life into frequently hectic and increasingly isolated lives.

The present study will examine how the local church is being forced to recognize and adapt to this new context. More particularly, it will examine how one established mainline church in Oshawa is responding to the current societal changes. Finally, it will offer a qualitative analysis of one experiment this church has initiated to address the arising challenges of its new context.

CHAPTER 2

A PROFILE OF CHRIST MEMORIAL CHURCH

Each church is shaped by its history and its demographics, both of which are ongoing dynamic forces. The ecclesiological, liturgical, catechetical, and missiological frameworks that are lived out in its shared life and practices always are changing. The history, demographics, and frameworks of Christ Memorial Church, Oshawa, illustrate this dynamism beautifully.

Christ Memorial Church: A Brief History

Christ Church began in February 1928 as a church plant of St. George's Anglican Church, which was at that time the only Anglican parish in Oshawa. The first worship services of this fledgling parish were held in a nearby school (now called Dr. S. J. Phillips School). The first business meeting of the church was held in March of that same year, and approval was given to purchase land at the corner of Mary and Hillcroft streets, in what was then the north of the city. By October a basement for the initial church building was constructed, and the cornerstone was laid on Saturday, October 20, 1928.¹

¹ All history is taken from Christ Memorial Church Selection Committee, *Parish Profile* (Oshawa, ON: Christ Memorial Church, September 2002), 2, unless otherwise stated.

The initial goal of the parish was to construct a church hall in which they could gather for worship and ministry until a full church building could be completed. However, with the onset of the Great Depression, this goal proved too great a financial challenge. The parish worshipped in the basement structure from 1928 until after the end of World War II. In 1946 the parish of Christ Church became self-supporting. The long-planned church building, complete with a memorial tower to honor those who had died in the war, was dedicated on March 13, 1947. This was also the year that the parish's official name was changed from "Christ Church" to "Christ Memorial Church," in honor of the many Canadians who had died on the battlefields of Europe.

The next two decades were ones of rapid growth and increasing stability at Christ Church. Under the leadership of the venerable H. D. Cleverdon, an archdeacon of the Diocese, the parish grew from seventy-five to over five hundred families. Archdeacon Cleverdon served for twenty-two years as the priest of the parish during what long would be remembered as its glory days.² Christ Church boasted a large and active Anglican Church Women's group, an overflowing Sunday school, and an average Sunday attendance of over two hundred. The congregation not only built a new church building and rectory but came to own a second rectory used to house the parish's assistant curate.

Over the next thirty years, the parish experienced a period of slow but steady decline, also seen in many churches across Canada. A Benchmark and Planning Study, conducted for the Diocese of Toronto in 2004 and 2005, showed that the Average Sunday Attendance at Christ Church declined from 220 in 1970 to 162 in 2003, with the most

² Lois Adam, interview by author, Oshawa, ON, October 2011. Adam has been a parish member for seventy-one years.

rapid decline happening during the 1970s.³ In addition to this demographic challenge, on January 28, 1976, the interior of the church sanctuary was destroyed by fire. It was almost two years before reconstruction was completed. Despite a period of charismatic renewal in the early 1980s, and stable incumbencies of ten years (the Reverend Canon Don Beatty) and then sixteen years (the Reverend Canon Bruce McCallum), the slow decline in church attendance proceeded across the decades.

In 2002, as the parish prepared for a new incumbent to arrive, it conducted a parish-wide questionnaire. Responses indicated that the parish strongly desired to introduce a more contemporary worship service, expand its ministry to youth, and deepen its outreach to non-churched and de-churched people in Oshawa.⁴ These goals and the further development of lay leaders were prominent factors during the process of selecting a new priest. Although the parish was still a traditional Anglican parish with a strong focus on caring for its members, it was beginning to become aware of its context in an increasingly secular culture. Members saw that change was needed in order for it to respond to that context.

In July 2003 I began my ministry as the new Anglican priest at Christ Church. From 2003 to 2011 the leadership team, consisting of me and several key ministry leaders, led the parish through a growing discernment of its unique mission in the context of Oshawa. This involved a process of increasing awareness about the changes in Canadian society and the needs of the surrounding community. It also entailed a growing understanding that mission is at the very core of our calling as a community of faith. It encompassed a realization of

³ Myrlene Boken, *Toronto Planning Study: The Anglican Diocese of Toronto* (Churchill, ON: AMB Research, 2005).

⁴ Christ Memorial Church Selection Committee, *Parish Profile*, Appendix 1.

the need for the parish of Christ Church to be centered in serving God's mission in our particular context. Finally, it involved some experimentation and risk taking in the life of the parish in terms of its worship, discipleship training, and outreach. This process did not proceed along a steady progression but rather engaged many twists and turns.

Present Demographics of Christ Memorial Church

In 2003 the Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) at Christ Church was 162. Over the next seven years the parishes saw seventy of its regularly attending members leave the parish either due to death, infirmity, or a move. Despite this significant decline, the 2011 ASA was still at 158, which indicates the parish has continued to attract significant numbers of new members, although not at a rate high enough to counter the demographic wave it now faces.⁵ Like Canadian society at large, the parish's membership is aging. Although the new members are significant in number, at over a hundred people, they tend to be less committed to worshipping every week. Older members now being buried once considered themselves regular attenders if they were present every Sunday, whereas new members consider themselves regular attenders if they are present every second or third Sunday. Many attend Sunday worship just once a month.

For people attending on Sundays in 2010, their demographic breakdown according to age is this: 13 percent were newborn to age ten, 3 percent were ages eleven to nineteen, 2 percent were ages twenty to twenty-nine, 25 percent were ages thirty to forty-five, 28.5

⁵ The Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Toronto, *Incumbent's Annual Statistical Return for 2010 for the Parish of Christ Memorial Church, Oshawa* (Toronto: Diocese of Toronto, March 2011), 2.

percent were ages forty-five to sixty-five, and 28.5 percent were over the age of sixty-five.⁶ What is clear from these numbers is that well over 50 percent of the congregation is middle-aged or elderly. While in 2010 there were still enough children present on Sundays to sustain running a Sunday school and nursery program, it is clear that young adults and families with young children do not attend on Sundays in any great strength.

There is other significant data for 2010. There were fifteen youth, from within and outside the church, attending the weekly youth group. Additionally, there were nine small groups meeting regularly within the parish for prayer, study, fellowship, and outreach. For a parish the size of Christ Church, this represents a healthy contingent of young people as well as a substantial number of adults willing to commit to regular Bible study, discussion, and fellowship. The building and property were in good shape, and the parish finances ended the year with a surplus. This too points to the relative health of the parish as a whole. However, while still a relatively healthy and vibrant parish, Christ Church is becoming more aware that its demographic make-up presents serious challenges for the mission of the parish over the next few decades. Its primary adaptive challenges will be to reconnect with de-churched people and to connect with non-churched people.

Changing Frameworks of the Congregation

Since the founding of Christ Church over eighty years ago, the parish has seen much change in both the surrounding Canadian society and in Anglicanism as a denomination. A few members continue to reminisce longingly for the prior context of their church and are mystified by the changes. Most members, however, now have

⁶ Ibid.

accepted that there is no going back and that the new context of the Church, while challenging, will hold some new and exciting possibilities. Christ Church is a community with many faithful people who believe that God somehow will enable the parish to survive and even thrive. They are ready to do what they can, with the energy and resources still present. Due to a growing awareness of their new context, the frameworks operating in the parish are changing. The parish increasingly perceives the Church, worship, Christian learning, and mission in a new way.

Ecclesiological Frameworks

Avery Dulles, in *Models of the Church*, presents six models for understanding the Church. He notes the strengths and weaknesses of each model, conveying that no one model can describe the Church fully.⁷ Examined in the light of Dulles' framework, there are three primary ecclesiologies operating at Christ Memorial Church: the Church as a community of disciples, the Church as a mystical communion, and the Church as servant.

The first and predominant ecclesiological framework that exists in Christ Memorial is the Church as a "community of disciples."⁸ As an evangelical Anglican parish rooted in Scripture and focused on Jesus Christ, there has been a strong focus on biblical literacy and learning to live as followers of Jesus for at least the past three decades. This focus on learning and building deep relationships within community has continued, as today Christ Church has nine small groups that meet weekly or bi-weekly. These groups encourage the small group members not only to learn together what it

⁷ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 26-94, 193-217.

⁸ Ibid., 195-217.

means to be followers of Jesus but also fosters the formation of deep ties among members and meaningful service to the community beyond. There is a strong sense at Christ Church that to be the Body of Christ means to learn together and build deep bonds with one another, sharing resources as well as the joys and struggles of life.

Although the predominant ecclesiological model operating at Christ Church, this model of a “community of disciples” is shifting, as the very nature of discipleship training is changing in a post-Christendom context. There is a growing awareness that fewer and fewer people know the basic doctrines and practices of Christianity. To adjust to this reality, in the spring of 2010, leaders designed a two-year discipleship training program called “Mosaic.” This two-year course seeks to ground new believers in the basics of Scripture, the historic creeds, Christian disciplines, and church history. As of 2011, there were twenty-four adults participating in this program, many of whom are new to the parish in the last five years. As fewer people come into the parish already fully formed as disciples of Jesus Christ, more intentional discipleship training in the context of the gathered community is becoming understood as a necessity.

The second ecclesiology in Dulles’ framework that presently functions at Christ Church is the Church as “mystical communion.”⁹ This refers to an ecclesiology emphasizing a communion of all those in the Body of Christ. It is mystical because it is based in the activity of God rather than in human structures. It is a communion that supersedes local congregations, dioceses, and even denominations because it is considered a supernatural entity.

⁹ Ibid., 39-54.

Anglicans have a strong awareness of and joy in the worldwide Anglican Communion as one arm of the broader Church. The history and identity of the Anglican Church links very much to this broader communion made up of many different ethnic and cultural groups, surviving across many generations. Being part of this body has given Christ Church a strong sense of the Church as a mystical communion that is reflected in, but supersedes, organizational structures. This ecclesiology of communion is reinforced through the parish's Sunday worship. In addition to Canadian Anglican liturgies, liturgical resources from several other Christian traditions are used. Particularly at the contemporary Eucharist, the parish employs a rich mix of liturgical resources. This includes a Prayer of Consecration from the Church of the Province of Kenya,¹⁰ liturgy from the Iona Community in Scotland,¹¹ and various calls to worship and prayers of confession drawn from a Presbyterian resource.¹² Intercessions for the Church in various parts of the world also are included in the liturgy of worship each Sunday.

In addition to this sense of being part of the worldwide Body of Christ, Christ Church has been a parish with a strong focus on prayer. This is another characteristic of Dulles' ecclesiology of mystical communion.¹³ The weekly Centering Prayer Group, Alongsiders Prayer Ministry Team, and email Prayer Chain all receive prayer requests from many people both within and outside the parish. A prayer team also is available to pray

¹⁰ The Anglican Church of the Province of Kenya, "The Ministry of the Sacrament," http://www.msgr.ca/msgr-3/kenyan_rite_05_TheMinistryoftheSacrament.htm (accessed November 8, 2011).

¹¹ The Iona Community, *Iona Abbey Worship Book* (Glasgow, Scotland: Wild Goose Publications, 2001).

¹² Paul Galbreath, ed., *Call to Worship* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003).

¹³ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 51.

with people after they have received Eucharist each Sunday at the 9:15 a.m. service.

Anointing with oil and prayers for healing are offered at all three Sunday worship services.

One key way that this ecclesiological model of Church as mystical communion is shifting at Christ Church relates to the effect of globalization, which is giving rise to a greater ethnic diversity in the parish. Once an almost exclusively Caucasian parish, a growing number of the parish's present members emigrated from other parts of the Anglican Communion—including Bahrain, India, Sierra Leone, and the Caribbean. They have brought with them both a love for worship within an Anglican ethos and a desire to reflect various ethnic and cultural backgrounds in that worship. This takes the form of including worship songs of African origin, inviting guest musicians or preachers from different cultural backgrounds for special services, and using liturgies from other parts of the Anglican Communion.

The third ecclesiology found in Dulles' framework that is predominant at Christ Church is the Church as "servant."¹⁴ As a mainline denomination, Anglicans traditionally have held social service and social justice issues to be vital to the mission of the Church. Just as in the Anglican missionary movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s, education, health care, and nutrition have gone hand in hand with the telling of the gospel story.

Christ Church has a decades-long connection with a local food bank and hospital, in addition to a strong focus on education and caring for the marginalized in society. Over twenty years ago, the parish was a founding member of Gate 3:16, a drop-in and resource center serving the poor and homeless in the city. For twenty-eight years the parish has

¹⁴ Ibid., 81-94.

hosted a Christmas Day Dinner for people who otherwise would be alone on Christmas. It is attended by up to 105 people each year. Many parish members also volunteer through such diverse agencies as Meals on Wheels and St. Vincent's Kitchen. Ten years ago, in response to the murder of a child in the parish by an estranged father, members of Christ Church helped to found Luke's Place, a resource center for abused women and children in the community. Seeing the Church as "servant" continues today in this parish, as it now strives to build stronger relationships with community agencies and ministries in order to help in the work they do.

In addition to these three predominant ecclesiologies operating at Christ Church, there are two more in evidence: the Church as institution and the Church as herald. The first is in decline, while the second is increasing. The Church as "institution" refers to an emphasis on the visible governance structures of the Church as an organization, while the Church as "herald" signifies a focus on the Church's role of proclamation and witness.

As Anglicans, the Church as "institution" long has been a part of the functioning ecclesiology.¹⁵ The majority of Christ Church's members are very deferential to and honoring of bishops and diocesan officials. There remains a corporate/institutional identity in the parish; and it is expected to fully participate in diocesan synods, committees, and boards. This model of the Church, however, is in decline at Christ Church. Like many parishes now, Christ Church is finding its own particular expressions of worship, discipleship, and service. There exists increasing ambivalence by parishioners to top-down directives from the Diocese of Toronto's instruction to parishes

¹⁵ Ibid., 26-38.

to participate in such things as diocesan outreach programs. At best, there is also a grudging acceptance of the required annual allotment paid to the Diocese of Toronto for the purpose of maintaining diocesan offices, staff, and programs.

Another reason that the institutional model of Church is in decline in this parish has to do with challenges facing Anglicanism as a whole. This is a time of ecclesiastical turmoil, as the Anglican Church of Canada is embroiled in a dispute encompassing the entire worldwide Anglican Communion over the issue of homosexuality. Local parishes are being caught up in debates and church splits over what constitutes orthodox belief and practices, cultural norms, and the authority of Holy Scripture. Composed of people with a variety of views on homosexuality, most parishes are forced to focus on this issue even though many feel it is an enormous distraction from the broader mission of the Church. While the debate is positioned in the context of the worldwide Anglican Communion, perhaps ironically it is causing many parishes to see themselves as distinct from their diocesan or national church bodies or as distinct from other parishes within those bodies. In other words, even in parishes which traditionally have been resolutely ecclesiastical, a form of congregationalism is growing. To some extent this contributes as well to the decline at Christ Church of the ecclesiological model of the Church as “institution.”

Just as the institutional model of Church is in decline at Christ Church, another ecclesiological model is on the rise. As the congregation becomes more aware of the secularization of the surrounding culture, more parish members want to learn about and experiment with ways to share their faith. This sharing of faith through the proclamation

of the gospel is typical of an ecclesiology of the Church as “herald” in Dulles model.¹⁶

There is a growing interest in evangelism. The parish has become more and more involved in reaching out to seekers through such things as The Alpha Course,¹⁷ The Twelve Steps: A Spiritual Journey,¹⁸ and Messy Church. There is an increasing awareness that, as Christians, church members should be able to share their own stories of faith. However, at Christ Church this model remains in its earliest stages of development. The idea that faith is a private matter remains somewhat entrenched.

While these various ecclesiologies based on Dulles’ model presently function at Christ Church, a subtle shift has been happening over the past few years to include another ecclesiology that is not encompassed in his framework. There has been a growing interest among both laity and clergy in understanding the Church as a counter-cultural community. A variety of authors are calling the Church again to be a contrast community, and they are helping to unpack in actual practices what such a community would look like. Gerhard Lohfink in *Jesus and Community* stresses the need for commitment to togetherness, authentic bonds of love, generosity, the renunciation of violence, and a joyful freedom as expected characteristics of a healthy church.¹⁹ This clarion call for the Church to reclaim its role as “distinctive people who enact a different story in the midst of the world” is also the key emphasis of Barry Harvey in *Another City*.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid., 68-80.

¹⁷ Holy Trinity Brompton, *The Alpha Course* (London: Holy Trinity Brompton Publications, 1995).

¹⁸ Friends in Recovery, *The Twelve Steps: A Spiritual Journey* (Centralia, WA: RPI Publishing, 1994).

¹⁹ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

²⁰ Barry Harvey, *Another City* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 1999), 19.

Ironically, an ecclesiology of the Church as a counter-cultural community seems to be stimulated presently as much from outside the church as from within. As an increasingly secularized society becomes more and more out of sync with basic Christian teachings and practices, communities of faith—living out such traditional Christian practices as worshipping, studying Scripture, praying, and giving significantly to the poor—necessarily will be seen as counter-cultural. Indeed, as Canadian society continues to become more secular, it is likely that the various ecclesiological frameworks of Christ Church will continue to change in response to its increasing role as part of a mystical communion of heralds, disciple makers, and servants.

Liturgical Frameworks

When Christ Church was founded, parishes across the worldwide Anglican Communion worshipped following a format based on the denomination's historic British roots. Although variations in the actual language were permissible, the form was patterned after the historic liturgies of the Church of England. There was very little variety week to week, apart from the Scriptures being read and the hymns being sung. The Scriptures to be read were on a regular cycle and were based on the Psalms, key teachings and events recorded in the Gospels, and selections from the Epistles. Apart from the odd prayer that changed to reflect the Church year, the liturgy of worship was remarkably static. There was one approved liturgical resource; the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP).²¹ It was characterized by its beautiful but archaic language, its many

²¹ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, *Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1962).

references to the British monarchy, and a rich theology that was heavy on sin, confession, and repentance. It assumed that those gathered for worship were already Christians with significant knowledge of the Scriptures. If individuals worshiped in English at an Anglican church anywhere in the world, they knew the liturgy. This was the norm at Christ Church for the first four decades of the parish.

However, with the 1970s and 1980s came two forces that radically impacted its liturgical frameworks: liturgical reform across the Anglican Communion and the charismatic renewal movement. Both of these resulted in significant changes in Anglican practice. The changes caused significant turmoil and conflict across the Anglican Church of Canada and within the parish of Christ Church, as people were exposed to new forms and practices of worship through both of these movements. The official hierarchy of the denomination brought new liturgies of worship, and the renewal movement brought a new ethos of worship

Liturgical reform across the Anglican Communion—including India, Canada, New Zealand, Kenya, and Australia—resulted in new liturgies being published. These reflected such broad goals as to modernize the language of worship, to give voice to local theologies, to give greater emphasis to the grace of God, and to encourage wider ecumenical interaction. In Canada, experimental liturgies were granted approval on a temporary and trial basis. In 1985 the *Book of Alternative Services* (BAS) was approved for use in the Anglican Church of Canada.²² Over the next two decades it became the primary liturgical resource for Sunday worship in most Canadian Anglican churches. Its

²² General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985).

development also allowed for a greater variety in Anglican worship, as many churches continued to offer one worship service using the *Book of Common Prayer* but now also offered a service using the *Book of Alternative Services*. Likewise, this became the pattern at Christ Church.

Into this climate of widespread liturgical reform also came the charismatic renewal movement, starting in the mid-seventies and progressing across the next two decades. This movement introduced into Canadian Anglican churches the singing of choruses based on Scripture passages, extemporaneous prayer, and a focus on the gifts of the Spirit with an emphasis on speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy. This movement, with its strong emphasis on the laity, brought both radical liturgical change and significant turmoil to many Anglican parishes. It tended to divide parishes along traditional and charismatic lines. While many Anglicans continued to want to worship with traditional hymns and written prayers, those Anglicans involved in the charismatic renewal often wanted newer music and extemporaneous prayers. This group also wanted to emphasize teaching on the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit, which for many Anglicans was a new experience. As with any change, there was fear that traditional ways would be lost. On the other hand, many Anglicans saw this as an important move of the Holy Spirit that should not be ignored.

The charismatic renewal movement began to affect Anglican parishes in Oshawa in the early 1980s.²³ At Christ Church it resulted in the starting of a third Sunday worship service during the incumbency of Rev. Beatty. This development was seen by some as a

²³ Anglican Renewal Ministries, "History of Anglican Renewal Ministries," <http://www.armcanada.org/history.htm> (accessed November 8, 2011).

source of disunity and by others as an important movement of the Holy Spirit which could enliven the church. Many of the parish's older members still recall the new life that was breathed into Christ Church through the Anglican Cursillo movement, which began as a Roman Catholic renewal movement centered on a weekend retreat, follow-up small groups, and larger worship gatherings.²⁴ Other avenues for celebration of spiritual renewal came through prayer and praise gatherings, retreats, and healing services. All of these had their roots in the charismatic renewal movement.

When Rev. McCallum became the parish priest at Christ Church he felt there was a need to build greater unity in the parish, since the charismatic renewal of the previous decade had resulted in some turmoil. The parish returned to the practice of having two Sunday worship services. The first was a quiet 8:30 a.m. service using the *Book of Common Prayer*. This was followed by a 10:00 a.m. service using primarily the *Book of Alternative Services* but incorporating a blend of traditional hymns and more contemporary worship songs.

The BAS offered more modern language and a greater liturgical variety than the BCP,²⁵ with six approved Eucharistic Prayers rather than one and two forms of the Lord's Prayer. However, the language of worship continued to assume significant familiarity with Christian theology and Anglican terms. It also retained a framework of the traditional five-fold pattern of worship. This consistently includes the gathering of the community, the ministry of the Word, prayer, the ministry of Sacrament, and the sending of the

²⁴ Canadian Anglican Cursillo, <http://www.anglicancursillo.com/> (accessed November 8, 2011).

²⁵ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, *Book of Alternative Services*, 193-210.

community. This liturgy, although more contemporary in language, assumed not only a literate congregation but one skilled at juggling an enlarged hymn book, a bigger prayer book, and a printed order of service. At Christ Church this too was the norm, although there began to be an interest in developing a more contemporary form of worship that relied less on books and incorporated a wider variety of instruments and music into worship.

In March 2004, Christ Church began a third Sunday worship service held at 11:15 a.m. The liturgy was projected on a screen, allowing for greater liturgical variation and the inclusion of new worship music. A worship band was formed, made up of a keyboardist, drummer, flautist, guitarist, bass player, and vocalists. Video clips and PowerPoint presentations were able to be incorporated into the sermons. No juggling of books or finding of correct pages was necessary. This service was intended to make Anglican worship accessible to non-Anglicans and even the non-churched. By 2005, this service was already the larger of the two main services.

While the liturgical frameworks at Christ Church have changed markedly over its history, liturgy continues to be seen as a vital part of an essential Anglican identity. Today liturgy no longer is seen as a predominantly historic and static resource. It is viewed as a dynamic and vital part of a key response to the changing context of the church. Liturgy no longer can assume a congregation arrives to a service knowledgeable about the Scriptures or Christian teaching and traditions, as it did during Christendom. Christian liturgy must continue to teach these things, as it always has, but the format and starting points need to reflect the post-Christendom environment in which the Western Church now exists.

Catechetical Frameworks

In a Christendom setting, catechesis largely involved passing along particular denominational teachings to the children of Christians as they matured in the context of their particular denomination. In a Christendom setting, catechesis aimed at those outside a particular church's own membership largely was viewed as an attempt to encroach on another denomination's territory. Accordingly, in the early decades of Christ Church, Oshawa, catechesis mostly involved Sunday school for the children of its members, culminating in confirmation classes. Once confirmed, usually around age twelve or thirteen, children were considered full Anglicans who now were welcome to receive Holy Communion as it was practiced in this particular branch of the Church. Adults were expected to have gone through this process themselves and continued their learning through sermons and personal study. Since almost everyone was considered to be a Christian of one shade or another, there was little focus on evangelism or disciple-making. Any additional opportunities for learning within the Christendom parish focused primarily on the spiritual growth of its members and were led by the clergy, who in a Christendom model were considered the professionals. For example, growing up as a child in the late 1950s and through the early 1970s, I remember that it was unheard of for lay people to lead a Bible study group without clergy present.

In a post-Christendom context, catechesis necessarily looks quite different. Now there is a need to engage with people who know nothing of the Christian story. Such catechesis needs to focus on helping people understand who Jesus is, what God is like, the basic teachings and practices of Christianity, and how their lives can fit into God's

Kingdom. Particularly over the past two decades, the catechetical frameworks of Christ Church have changed to reflect an awareness of the parish's new context in a post-Christendom society.

From the late 1970s through the 1990s, parish missions that largely were associated with the charismatic renewal movement became a popular means of engaging parish members and their friends in a deeper understanding of the faith. The Alpha Course, Christianity Explored,²⁶ and other professionally produced catechetical courses began to appear in the late 1990s in an attempt to explain the faith to seekers. Christ Church began The Alpha Course in 2001, involving its own members at first but in subsequent courses reaching more de-churched and non-churched people. With its use of humor and plain language and by addressing basic questions of faith, this course was central to the parish's first attempts to reach out with the gospel to those who wished to explore it.

Since 2003 other developments in the life of the parish reflect changes to its catechetical frameworks. Christ Church started to offer an annual service of adult confirmation and reaffirmation as a means of celebrating adults returning to faith or finding it for the first time. Most of those confirming or reaffirming their faith are de-churched or non-churched adults. Although these individuals were baptized as infants, they had little significant involvement with Christianity after their childhood years. In general, Christ Church also began to see more adults being baptized, as people came to Christ through the Alpha Course or the Twelve Steps: A Spiritual Journey course.

²⁶ Christianity Explored, <http://www.christianityexplored.org/course> (accessed November 8, 2011).

Finally, the most recent evidence of changes to catechetical frameworks at Christ Church is seen in the development of Mosaic, its two-year discipleship training program for adults. In a post-Christendom context, the knowledge imparted by this program conveys the basics as the story of Scripture, the creeds, elemental church history, and Christian disciplines—all of which cannot be assumed for those walking through the doors of Christ Church. In this way, catechesis is taking on a more intentional framework at Christ Church. As with ecclesiological and liturgical frameworks, catechetical frameworks are changing in response to the new setting in which the church finds itself.

Missiological Frameworks

Since the founding of Christ Church, many of its members and the congregation as a whole have been active in the surrounding community. Christ Church always has valued connection with its neighborhood and city. However, in the parish's early decades, during the last glimpses of Christendom, connections in the neighborhood were viewed less as mission and more as simply being good neighbors. During Christendom, mission largely was perceived as happening elsewhere—India, Africa, or perhaps the Arctic. Mission was something that missionaries did in far away and exotic lands. Hence, mission was supported by local Canadian churches sending people or money somewhere else. Certainly in the early decades of Christ Church there was an emphasis on this sort of mission.²⁷

Mission that did happen in the local neighborhood was considered primarily the responsibility of the professionals: the clergy. Many of the oldest members of Christ Church recall that Archdeacon Cleverdon went knocking on the doors of people who just

²⁷ Adam, interview by author.

moved into the neighborhood to invite them to church.²⁸ If they were Anglican it was assumed they would have been attending the Anglican parish closest to them.

As Christendom began to decline, many Anglican churches began struggling with stressors associated with this major cultural shift. This caused churches to focus more on their own well-being and survival. Christ Church was not immune to this stress. Its cause was primarily three-fold. First, this was due to an aging congregation. As members became elderly they often moved away, became shut-ins, or died—thereby reducing overall numbers in the parish. Second, increased stress arose due to declining financial resources. Naturally, as numbers decreased so did financial donations; and third, there was increased stress in the parish due to fewer people being available to serve in volunteer capacities, which resulted in some parishioners being overloaded with duties and some ministries having to be put on hold. It was not that members of Christ Church did not desire to connect with the surrounding neighborhood to demonstrate the love of God; rather, they simply had less energy, fewer people, and not as many resources to do so.

In addition to being affected by an increased focus on its own survival, the missiological frameworks at Christ Church were influenced by profound cultural changes happening in the broader society. Many of the ways of connecting in the early decades of the parish just did not seem to work very well anymore. When Christ Church began, the vast majority of people in the neighborhood belonged to a church and went there to have their spiritual needs met. This happened primarily on Sundays when not much else happened in the culture. Churches were important places to build social and business

²⁸ Ibid.

networks through things like businessmen's breakfasts, couples' clubs, and Anglican women's groups. Families enrolled their children in Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, which often were run in church halls and basements. People worked together to raise funds for the church and various social causes, such as hospital guilds and soup kitchens. Churches provided valued communal events like funeral teas, rummage sales, and Christmas bazaars. Almost all of this has declined over the short period of just a few decades.

Today many people believe they can commune with God best on the golf course or at their yoga session. They take part in social-networking sites on the internet and sign up their children for a plethora of sport, music, and art programs offered by municipal facilities. Many of these activities happen on Sunday mornings. They donate directly to hospitals and other social agencies online or by participating in lotteries offered by those agencies. A significant percentage of the population no longer associates the Church even with funerals or weddings. Infant baptisms, which were once considered a normal rite of passage, now are seen as necessary by only a tiny and dwindling minority. Whereas the culture itself used to support the connections between churches and the people that lived nearby, that cultural framework has vanished. Christendom is breaking down quickly, and changing frameworks of mission are showing up in several key areas of parish life.

The first of the intentional missional changes at Christ Church involves the way the Outreach Team operates. This team began as one of the standing committees of the parish. Initially, it consisted of parish members who met a few times a year to plan which agencies would receive funds from the line in the parish budget allotted for that purpose. Over the years various ministries and agencies have been suggested by these members,

and the committee's work entailed making sure that the appropriate checks were sent, the progress reports were received, and the congregation was informed via the annual vestry report about these agencies. In short, outreach primarily entailed sending money to worthy institutions and causes in the community and beyond.

During the past three years, the work of the Outreach Team has shifted from sending money to building relationships within the Oshawa community. Members of the team now serve as parish connectors, individuals who liaison directly with a local agency or institution. These parish connectors interact with leaders serving at the nearest hospital, high school, various Christian ministries for the poor and marginalized, and even the local public elementary school. The purpose of the parish connectors is to discover the needs in these various community settings that the parish can help meet. While the parish still raises money to support many of these groups, through the connectors the congregation is now more aware of actual day-to-day needs and many non-monetary ways that it also can be of help. Equally important, these institutions and agencies increasingly are aware of the church and have a growing relationship with it through the parish connectors, who stay in touch with them regularly.

These strengthened relationships bore fruit in a very tangible way when the head of the Guidance Department at the local high school contacted the church to ask if she could come on a Sunday to personally thank Christ Church for the Tickets for Teens project. This summer outreach project raised funds to provide bus passes at a reduced cost for needy teens at the school. This was a need that the Guidance Department had identified and conveyed to the Outreach Team through its connector. On Sunday, March

28, 2010, the congregation experienced firsthand the fruit of intentionally building relationships in the neighborhood through its outreach connectors. The high school guidance counselor shared several wonderful stories about how the church's help had made a difference in the lives of a number of teens.

A second area of parish life that has blossomed in unexpected missional ways has to do with a new relationship with Mary Street Community School, a public school located four blocks south of the Christ Church building. This relationship began late in 2009 when one of the parish's oldest and most respected members called the church office to say he had attended a meeting of his Kiwanis group and heard a presentation by the principal of this school. She described a student who was frequently truant. One day when the principal called the student's home, she was surprised to have the phone answered by the student, who told her that the reason she could not come to school that day was because her "mommy needed the coat." The senior church member thought it would be a good idea for the head of the Outreach Team to make an appointment with the principal to help the parish get connected there.²⁹

The initial phone call was indicative of three changes related to mission in the congregation that evidently had been internalized by this key senior member. First, there existed an expectation that building relationships at the school was part of the missional outreach of the church. Second, the involvement of lay people and ultimately the entire congregation was seen as central to this mission; and third, there was an understanding that mission needed to begin with listening to the needs expressed by staff at the school

²⁹ Jim Howard, interview by author, Oshawa, ON, November 2009.

itself. While the call from this senior member was completely unexpected, it seemed to indicate real missional growth in a segment of the congregation that one might have thought would be the most resistant to change. Ultimately, this situation gave rise to the formation of a Missional Action Team (MAT), a lay-led group of people who help discern a local initiative for mission.³⁰ The MAT's purpose and process have been outlined by authors Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk in their book, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*.

At Christ Church, members first met to learn about their role as a Missional Action Team and to brainstorm about how they might develop a relationship with the nearby school. Then team members arranged to meet with the principal to discern how the church might help educators in their important work. Once a project was agreed upon, the MAT engaged the whole congregation through several special events and a project-specific fundraising drive. The team continued to build connections with the school as the project progressed. It followed up by setting some goals together with the school for the subsequent year. While the parish has been studying this process as it related to its own missional life, it could not have predicted it would result in this specific engagement with a local school.

A third way in which changing missiological frameworks are evident at Christ Church is that members of the parish are beginning to engage their neighbors in several new ways, without any formal program or process involved. Two families decided to hold neighborhood Halloween and Christmas gatherings. A single female member

³⁰ Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 33 and 187.

decided to give a gift certificate from a local restaurant to her new neighbors and then a couple of months later invited them over for supper. A group of musicians from within the parish who have formed a garage band decided to put two sets of music into the church auction for someone to purchase as part of a block party. There was significant bidding on this item, and in late June of 2010 a successful block party was organized by one of the parish's newest members.

Finally, evidence of more missional life arising at Christ Church was revealed in the form of three special events planned by one of the parish's small groups. These have included a car rally and corn roast to which people could invite neighbors, a Dixieland Jazz concert held at the church, and a concert at the church by the Durham Youth Orchestra. These three planned events were organized as opportunities to connect with those living in neighborhoods around the church. They were spontaneous and surprising evidence of new frameworks for mission operating in the parish.

The Impetus for Messy Church

The changing frameworks at Christ Church were not isolated changes; rather, they form part of a tapestry of connected adaptations to the changing context in which the parish finds itself. These changing frameworks also have been foundational for a new missional experiment in the parish. This experiment grew from one of the parish's primary adaptive challenges to reconnect with de-churched young adults. More particularly, the experiment addressed the issue of seemingly faith-filled Christian couples who had been raised in the church and had come to have their children baptized. They promised to raise their children in the community of faith and then failed to keep that promise.

Largely as a result of Appreciative Inquiry, which stresses the need for listening and dialogue to discern new avenues of praxis,³¹ it was decided to engage two such couples in an evening conversation. Instead of having them do the normal class for parents seeking infant baptism, which both of them already had done when their first child was baptized, they were invited to talk about the reality of their lives and how faith fit into those lives. The discussion began with the recognition that although the baptismal promises include a commitment to participate actively in the faith community, many couples did not actually do so following their child's baptism. The two couples then were asked how the parish could make a better connection with them, so that this did not happen. Their answers were very informative.³²

They stated that the parish in fact had made a good connection with them. However, on Sunday mornings it was simply too hard for them to attend worship. They further conveyed that they were away from their children all week, as both parents commuted for work and the children were in daycare. On Sundays the last thing they wanted to do was to leave their children in the nursery at church while they attended the service. They described the stress of getting the family ready for church and then the children's protest at being left in the nursery. They also described their struggle if they kept their children in the service, as they felt the children would bother the people around them.

As the discussion continued these couples then were asked what could work for them as a family, since Sunday church was clearly not meeting their needs. They replied

³¹ Mark Branson, *Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 21-40 and 65-112.

³² Tony Meideros and Janet Meideros, interview by author, Oshawa, ON, January 2008.

that what would work was an hour on Saturday mornings, when they all could work together as a family on some crafts, stories, and songs around a specific Bible story. They could come as they were; the children could be children; and they as parents could help their children learn about the Bible, prayer, Jesus, and faith. It seemed that the faith these parents had shown in the baptismal preparation sessions prior to their first child's baptism had not been a complete illusion. They indeed cared deeply about nurturing their children's spiritual development. The parish, however, simply had not been offering something that enabled them to do that.

This interaction convinced both lay and clergy leaders of Christ Church that instead of resisting the changes in today's culture, the parish needed to be willing to experiment with new ways to meet the needs people expressed. The changing ecclesiological, liturgical, catechetical, and missiological frameworks at Christ Church have encouraged the parish to be open to experimentation with new forms of liturgy and learning. This eventually would give rise to a new way of engaging both de-churched and non-churched young families in a multigenerational, multi-sensory worship and learning experience called Messy Church.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Serious adaptive challenges arise for individuals, organizations, and societies during periods of profound change. Western society today is in just such a period. The very foundations of its educational, economic, and moral frameworks are being shaken. Long-held ways of looking at the world and understanding the place of human beings in it are being questioned. It is a time of tumultuous transition in which the Church is being forced to live out its calling and mission in new ways.

The Changing Context of Society

The changes taking place in Western society have been profiled across many different disciplines of study. Two texts are of particular interest to the current discussion. The first examines the historical roots and development of today's tumultuous post-modern society. The second explores the challenges of leadership in such a context. Both texts offer analysis that is relevant and applicable to the challenges facing churches and church leadership today.

Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity by Stephen Toulmin

In *Cosmopolis*, Stephen Toulmin offers an excellent historical overview of the rise and fall of modernity and the resultant shifts now taking place in the present post-modern society.¹ Such discussion informs this project by providing an overview of how the societal context of the Western Church has changed markedly. Furthermore, Toulmin's exploration of key characteristics of society's present terrain proves helpful in Christ Church's navigation of its new context.

In his succinct description of the context that gave rise to modernity, Toulmin notes the significance of the development of the nation-state and of the Renaissance. He explores the rise of a mechanistic worldview that was at the very heart of modernity. This worldview looked to scientific method and rationality as the primary means by which the world around human beings could be known. Toulmin suggests that it was in the context of modern rationalism, with its quest for universal truths, that a disdain grew for four different kinds of practical knowledge: the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely.² The written word began to be considered more authoritative than the spoken word. Universal principles were emphasized over particular situations. General overarching truths were considered of superior importance to local realities. Timeless concepts applicable in all situations received focus rather than time-specific applications.³

¹ Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

² Ibid., 30.

³ Ibid., 31-35.

This preoccupation with universal truths did not develop in isolation. It stemmed from a desire for certain and unchanging facts and principles that could guide human society away from the political, social, and theological chaos of its recent past.⁴ In short, modernity provided absolute assurances about such things as the objectivity of the sciences and the rightful sovereignty of nations. Such certainties offered a mooring of sorts, but this mooring did not last.

Additionally, Toulmin profiles the gradual dismantling of modernity which led to the current state of flux and tumult. Every field of intellectual inquiry began to be challenged by new questions. New fields of study such as quantum physics and mechanics challenged the idea that matter was inert. Discoveries in astronomy and historical geology challenged the view of a relatively young earth. New developments in biology, anthropology, physiology, neurology, and ecology revealed the connectedness of life forms.⁵ Furthermore, all areas of intellectual inquiry were critiqued regarding how knowledge is linked to power and how it often is used to suppress and oppress alternative views. There was a growing recognition that there is no value-free science.⁶

Finally, Toulmin explores several reasons why post-modernity is so tumultuous. It means a loss of certainty, a breakdown in accepted frameworks, an increase in diversity, and a critical need for adaptation.⁷ With the post-modern critique of grand designs and

⁴ Ibid., 70.

⁵ Ibid., 148-151.

⁶ Ibid., 182.

⁷ Ibid., 183.

metanarratives has come a return in focus to the particular, the local, and the timely.⁸

Nevertheless, the frameworks of epistemology itself have been shaken, resulting in a feeling of confusion and loss. He suggests that there are two possible responses to the breakdown of modernity: imagining new possibilities or retreating into nostalgia for the past.⁹

Toulmin's examination of the rise and fall of modernity speaks to the challenges presently facing longstanding societal institutions in a post-modern context. Since Christ Church is such an institution, it too can learn from his analysis. The shift in focus he describes towards the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely in society at large may serve as markers by which Christ Church can best serve God in its local context. For example, in a post-modern context the rise of oral narrative, in the form of biblical storytelling, narrative preaching, and drama may enable the parish to better connect with people in its surrounding community. Unfortunately, *Cosmopolis* does not explore such possibilities directly, since its focus is primarily on secular societal institutions and structures. However, it does provide an overview that is helpful in informing the response of Christ Church in the new context in which it now exists.

Surfing the Edge of Chaos by Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann,
and Linda Gioja

In *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*, Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja draw on the science of complexity theory to discern leadership principles appropriate for today's context. They argue that while times of tumultuous change can seem like complete

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 203.

chaos, in reality “the world is not chaotic, it is complex.”¹⁰ During times of this sort of rapid and unpredictable change, in which complexity deepens and can become distressing, leaders need a deep understanding of how living systems operate. The analysis offered by these authors is relevant to the present research, because it offers insight into how living systems (which is how churches function) can best adapt in times of change.

These authors, writing primarily for the business community, propose a new model of leadership based on four principles relating to living systems:

1. Equilibrium is a precursor to death. When a living system is in a state of equilibrium, it is less responsive to changes occurring around it. This places it at maximum risk.
2. In the face of threat, or when galvanized by a compelling opportunity, living things move toward the edge of chaos. This condition evokes higher levels of mutation and experimentation, and fresh new solutions are more likely to be found.
3. When this excitation takes place, the components of living systems self-organize and new forms and repertoires emerge from the turmoil.
4. Living systems cannot be directed along a linear path. Unforeseen consequences are inevitable. The challenge is to disturb them in a manner that approximates the desired outcome.¹¹

The type of leader they propose as necessary in such a context is less a visionary problem solver and more a cultivator of “flexible, fast-reacting, innovative enterprise.”¹² Especially during rapid and tumultuous change, the ability to adapt and cultivate adaptive skills in others is required. An important strategy for doing this is to build organizational networks made up of people serving as creative and decision-making nodes within the

¹⁰ Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 6.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 15.

network. Strong communication links between the nodes are the key to the overall functioning of the organization. These authors suggest that “the self-organizing potential of a living system is enhanced by devolving power to the nodes, establishing connections to form networks, and by enriching these networks with information that sparks further evolution.”¹³

The nature of effective leadership is changing in today’s societal context. It is becoming more focused on cultivating the cooperative problem solving, flexibility, and experimentation that will lead to adaptation. As both systems theory and the science of complexity indicates, adaptation—although rarely proceeding linearly—is possible for systems with a thirst for survival. Unfortunately, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos* does not directly explore leadership in the Church, so specific application of their theories to the context of Christ Church requires further discussion, exploration, and experimentation. However, the characteristics they describe of effective leadership and the potential for systems to adapt in times of challenge can serve as hopeful markers to leaders in churches such as Christ Church, who struggle to adapt to the post-Christendom, post-modern context.

Final Thoughts

Human beings living in Western society now live in a culture in the midst of profound change. This change includes the re-framing of basic worldviews. This is due to the influences of post-modernity and the secularization of society.

Additionally, it includes the re-shaping of economic and political structures due to globalization. It involves changes in the lives of individuals around the world, due to new

¹³ Ibid., 130.

technologies that give widespread access to broad-based knowledge and also radically change interpersonal communication. With such profound changes taking place in Western society, all individuals, institutions, and organizations are being affected.

The Changing Context of the Church in Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America, Edited by Darrell Guder

The profound changes seen across Western society are reflected in changes facing the Western Church. No longer at the center of culture as it was during Christendom, the Church has been marginalized severely in both the public sphere and in the lives of the majority of individuals. A foundational discussion of the Western Church's context and a vision for its future was offered in what has become one of the most important texts on mission today. The analysis it offers as to the missional vocation of the Church and how that vocation is lived out through witness, community leadership, and structures have become the standard to which subsequent texts on the missional life of the Church are compared. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* is particularly relevant to the present study, because Darrell Guder has gathered various contributors to examine what is needed for the Church to be faithful to its vocation in its current, highly secularized context.¹⁴

As a team of ordained pastors and academics from five denominations, *Missional Church* contributors profile the on-the-ground context of the Western Church. They characterize it as a complex set of crises that include "diminishing numbers, clergy burnout, the loss of youth, the end of denominational loyalty, biblical illiteracy, divisions in the ranks,

¹⁴ Darrell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998).

the electronic church and its various corruptions, the irrelevance of traditional forms of worship, the loss of genuine spirituality, and widespread confusion about both the purpose and the message of the Church of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ Clearly, the Church’s present context is not simply about its external environment but is also about its internal environment. It is a context in which complex crises must be faced with few solutions in sight.

In this new context, then, the Church needs to consider what it means to be re-shaped for this task. In *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, the contributing authors emphasize that the Church once again must engage in mission as its very reason for being. They explore characteristics of this new context which may give rise to significant opportunities for mission. Some of these characteristics include an increased openness to spirituality, a seeking of community and identity, and a desire for rootedness.¹⁶ Despite now existing in a strange and sometimes hostile context, the Church remains responsible for sharing the good news of the Kingdom of God, as revealed and inaugurated by Jesus Christ. Local covenantal communities which embody and convey this message are central to mission in this new era.

The challenges of post-Christendom described by these authors are readily apparent in the context of Christ Church, Oshawa. Like so many churches, it struggles to adapt to an increasingly secular culture in which its purpose and relevancy are questioned. The parish’s experiment in offering Messy Church is one attempt to focus

¹⁵ Darrell L. Guder, ed., “Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent” in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 2.

¹⁶ Craig Van Gelder, “Missional Context: Understanding North American Culture,” in *Missional Church: a Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 44-45.

beyond itself and engage in God's mission to those it presently does not reach with the gospel. Through this multigenerational worship and learning experience, Christ Church desires to address the characteristics of people in its cultural context as described by *Missional Church* contributors. By inviting de-churched and non-churched young families to participate in a new form of liturgy, the parish hopes to tap into their spiritual openness and provide a sense of community, identity, and rootedness as it introduces them to the Living God.

Missional Engagement with the De-churched and Non-churched

One characteristic of the Western Church's context today is that attendance and participation have declined due to a number of factors in the broader society. Many people no longer coming did at one time attend church regularly. They are referred to here as "de-churched people." Increasing numbers of others in society have no past involvement with or knowledge of the Church. They are referred to here as "non-churched people." The primary adaptive challenge for churches existing in a post-Christendom context is to connect with de-churched and non-churched people. The question remaining is how to do this. The two texts profiled here point to new, innovative ways that have arisen in the Church to help build missional connections with such people. While the first text examines various forms of Church that have arisen across the UK, the second examines a particular approach focused on connecting with de-churched and non-churched young families. Both of these books are particularly relevant to the current study which explores a church's experiment in connecting with de-churched and non-churched people.

Mission-Shaped Church by the Working Group of the Church
of England's Public Affairs Council

Mission-Shaped Church is a profile of church-planting initiatives in England and was written by the Working Group of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council.¹⁷ In this text the de-churched population is subdivided into two categories. The first is "closed de-churched people," who have no intention of ever returning to church.¹⁸ The second encompasses "open de-churched people," who are open to returning if contacted and invited. The open de-churched are described as people for whom "their non-attendance often began as accidental, through a change in the pattern of their life . . . or due to lack of people their own age, difficulty because they perceived the church would censure their lifestyle, the realization that the local church could not cater for their children, or because the church demanded money."¹⁹ One of the adaptive challenges facing the Church in its present post-Christendom context is to re-connect with open de-churched people.

In terms of identified religion, the most quickly growing segment of Canadian society entails those who label themselves as having no religious affiliation. While some of these people actually may be de-churched, the majority never have had a church connection. While specific statistics are not available for Canada, it was reported in *Mission-Shaped Church* that the non-churched comprise 40 percent of the British

¹⁷ The Working Group of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-Shaped Church*.

¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹ Ibid., 38.

population.²⁰ This group is described as those who have “no history of church attendance—perhaps for several generations.”²¹ They have no familiarity with the Bible or the basic Christian story. They never have heard the creeds or the Lord’s Prayer, and the concept and practice of worship are foreign to them. They may not have any idea what happens in a church building. The thought of attending a service on a Sunday morning well could be as foreign as attending afternoon tea at Buckingham Palace. They have no idea of the culture of church: what clothing is worn or when to sit, stand, or shake hands. The *Mission-Shaped Church* suggests that “it must be accepted that any approach at evangelism or community involvement that assumes we can ‘bring people back to the church’ can only—at best—be effective for a diminishing proportion of the population. For most people, ‘church’ is either an utterly foreign culture, or one that they have decided to reject.”²² With this in mind, if local churches hope to connect with non-churched people they will need to examine all that they do through the eyes of the non-churched themselves.

Mission-Shaped Church depicts several Fresh Expressions of church that seem to connect well with non-churched people. These include café churches, which focus on relationship building in a coffee-house setting. People meet for discussion in very small groups over drinks and food.²³ Other forms of Fresh Expressions that are connecting with the non-churched are workplace cell churches that may meet over the lunch hour and

²⁰ Ibid., 39.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 50-52.

school-based churches that meet midweek right after school.²⁴ In both cases such churches may start as a one-time event that grows into more such events and then eventually blossoms into church. These gatherings look and feel very different from Sunday church services because they generally do not happen in church buildings and do not use prayer books or standardized liturgical forms. Such variation from accepted liturgical forms often causes the broader Church to question what it is that really makes these Fresh Expressions a church.

As reported in *Mission-Shaped Church*, a worldwide body of Anglican laity and clergy called the Anglican Consultative Council identified “Five Marks of Mission.” These are identified values expected of all churches involved in authentic mission. The five marks of such a church include the following: a focus on God the Trinity, being incarnational, embracing transformation, disciple-making, and being relational. The Working Group notes: “These five principles provide a broad standard to help discernment at a time when the shape of the Church of England is increasingly varied and in flux.”²⁵ These five marks are significant in that while they concentrate on core Christian teachings and praxis, they do not prescribe forms of worship or church structures. They are also important because they return the primary focus of the Church to that of mission. For the present study, and for other research examining new forms of ministry to the de-churched and non-churched, they form an important standard by which to measure experiments in mission.

²⁴ Ibid., 52-56 and 67-68.

²⁵ Ibid., 82.

Mission-Shaped Church is an encouragement to Christ Church in that it suggests that adaptation for the purpose of reaching people with the gospel is possible in today's context. As a text describing Fresh Expressions within the Church of England, this book was influential in the development of Messy Church within the parish of Christ Church, Oshawa. If such experimentation was fruitful in the birthplace of Anglicanism, perhaps it also can bear fruit in a Canadian Anglican parish. Since the Fresh Expressions movement is such a recent development, its sustainability and reproducibility remain to be seen in both the Church of England and the Anglican Church of Canada. As a preliminary text profiling this movement, it forms a crucial foundation. However, it is a foundation that will need to be built upon with qualitative analysis of these new forms of Church in the UK and across the post-Christendom context.

Messy Church: Fresh Ideas for Building a Christ-Centered Community
by Lucy Moore

Messy Church is Lucy Moore's landmark book describing the theology and practice of a particular Fresh Expression of church, which focuses on connecting with de-churched and non-churched young families. In this text Moore begins by examining how life is changing for young families in Western culture and how these changes are affecting the Church's ability to reach them with the gospel. Among factors that deter traditional churches from connecting with non-churched young families, she explains the foreignness for non-churched people of attending a Sunday worship service:

There are several problems with Sunday church. Here are a few. It's on Sunday. For many people who don't come to church, Sunday is now a day for family, sport, and shopping. It may be the only day that families have together. It may be

the day we visit Grandma. It may be when separated parents send the children off to the other parent at the other end of the country for the weekend. Rugby trials, football practice, netball tournaments, swimming competitions—children will be involved in all sorts of leisure activities on a Sunday, and church will have to be on a par with Disneyland to compete if the adults in the family aren't already committed Christians.²⁶

As this quote rightly identifies, what seems like normal Sunday practice to established Christians can seem very abnormal to de-churched and non-churched people. In a post-Christendom society in which there is no special designation of Sunday as a day of worship, the Church is simply one option among many. For the non-churched or even de-churched person, attending a Sunday worship service may seem like an inappropriate use of time.

Moore explains in *Messy Church* how a multigenerational, multi-sensory gathering of grandparents, parents, and children can enable the Church to re-connect with de-churched young families and connect with non-churched young families in order to build a Christ-centered community. This text not only explains the theology and ecclesiology undergirding this Fresh Expression of church, but it also offers detailed thematic programs to teach about particular Bible characters and concepts.²⁷ These thematic programs include suggestions for crafts, songs, and simple verbal presentations that relate to a particular theme. Suggestions also include recipes for a shared meal that will link in some way to this theme. As a worship and learning experience, Messy Church constitutes a form of liturgy very different from that of traditional Sunday worship. Moore stresses that this is critical to the goal of reaching people with the gospel who are not being reached presently.

²⁶ Moore, *Messy Church*, 17.

²⁷ Ibid., 70-208.

Clearly in the current context of the Church one of the primary adaptive challenges is to re-connect with de-churched people and connect with non-churched people. Given that many parishes continue to structure their life as if they were in Christendom, it seems unlikely that they will be able to connect with the non-churched. Sunday church services are not likely to be the connecting point. Again, relationships and a natural sharing of faith, in word and deed, by Christians will be vital in establishing and developing meaningful and long-term connections. The connecting point may be in the workplace lunchroom, the ski hill, the prenatal class, or the soccer field. It also may be within specific subcultures and affinity groups such as environmental or social activists.

Moore's book provided a useful foundation for Messy Church as it developed at Christ Church, Oshawa. Although structured somewhat differently than Moore's particular version, the Christ Church version of Messy Church shares a focus on teaching key Bible characters and themes, building community, and providing a context in which families can interact while learning about and worshipping God. A key element absent from Moore's resource was an evaluative template to enable church leaders to ascertain the actual effects of Messy Church on participating families. As part of a new and experimental Fresh Expressions movement a thorough qualitative evaluation of Messy Church in its various forms remains to be done.

Final Thoughts

This section has discussed the adaptive challenges of reconnecting with de-churched people and connecting with non-churched people. The question remains if present churches

are up to such a challenge. Communities of faith will need to make the transition from their old ways in Christendom to new ways required by the post-Christendom context.

For churches to be communities that form Christians with the skills to share faith in this context, they will need to change. In order for churches to re-shape their shared life so that they can connect with the de-churched and non-churched, they will need to change even more. This will require a praxis that helps churches remain faithful to the gospel but allows them to adapt to and thrive in their new post-Christendom context.

The Practical Theology of Changing Praxis

For many generations missionaries taking the gospel to other cultures learned to adapt their presentation and practices to enable their message to be heard. In its post-Christendom context the Western Church again will need to learn to do this. The two texts profiled in this section examine how such new learning happens. The first offers a general and theoretical approach to instilling new learning in the Church or among those the Church hopes to reach with the gospel. The second text suggests a pedagogical model specifically focused on cultivating a missional focus in established churches. Both of these books are relevant to the present study's exploration of how a traditional parish can re-shape its practices and structures in order for mission to be its core focus.

Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry by Thomas Groome

In *Sharing Faith*, Thomas Groome offers a comprehensive analysis of Christian education and proposes a pedagogical model for sharing the faith. He proposes five key

movements that lead to new learning. These include naming present praxis, reflecting critically on that praxis, making the Christian story and vision accessible to participants, engaging in a dialectical hermeneutic to appropriate the Christian story to the participant's stories, and ultimately helping participants come to a decision/response evidenced in lived Christian faith.²⁸ Groome makes a strong case for the way each movement builds on the previous one, leading to internalization and application of new praxis.

Groome's model for encouraging new praxis is relevant to churches wanting to learn how to adapt to a changing environment. A naming of present praxis, for example, can mean helping congregants see their church structures and practices not as static entities but as entities that have changed over time and that will need to change in the future. Critical reflection on a congregation's present praxis can enable church members to recognize that much of what they do is grounded in the inward focus of Christendom. This can assist them in recognizing the foreignness of church practices to the non-churched.

Applying Groome's model further, the accessible telling of key sections of the biblical story also can strengthen a congregation's understanding of its own missional vocation. For example, by revisiting the story of Abraham's call to be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:1-3), Ezekiel's vision of dry bones coming to life (Ezekiel 37:1-14), or Jesus' sending of the seventy-two disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God (Luke 10:1-11), church members can be encouraged to rediscover the Church's call to be a sign of and witness to God's mission to a hurting world. By embarking on this process of reflection on praxis and Christian story, churches may embrace a commitment to try a

²⁸ Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 146-148.

missional experiment in their own context. That experiment not only can bring new life in Christ to the new recipients of the Christian story but also may bring deeper life in Christ to the members of the church.

Groome's model and principles for cultivating new learning of the faith is particularly pertinent to the present study because it can be applied to Christ Church's ongoing goal of rediscovering mission as its reason for existence and learning to connect with de-churched and non-churched people. With its grounding in both lived experience and the biblical story, this model encourages people to consider how that story is lived out in their lives today. So whether applied to congregations needing to learn about their missional calling or considering how to best teach de-churched or non-churched people about the gospel, Groome's model offers hope to the a local parish like Christ Church. One possible limitation of the model is that it may be too broad in scope and general in description to be applied by many churches. Leaders would need to examine carefully how the focus activity and five movements in Groome's learning process can be applied to a specific teaching goal. Despite this, Groome's model provides a foundational framework for new learning as it faces the challenge of adapting to a new context.

The Missional Leader by Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk

As congregations struggle to adapt to what is now a missional context in a post-Christendom society, many churches seek a model of learning specifically focused on helping them make such adaptations. A model of Christian learning, specifically focused on enabling missional change, has been presented by Roxburgh and Romanuk. It has

particular relevance to the present study because it was the model of learning applied in the ministry context of Christ Memorial Church, which is the focus of this present research.

In *The Missional Leader*, Roxburgh and Romanuk describe a congregational process that they believe will enable churches to grow into communities intentionally focused on mission. The process involves five steps and is expected to unfold over a period of many months. The first two steps entail developing an awareness of the challenges people face in their context and understanding and integrating their thoughts and feelings regarding those challenges. The third step is to cultivate the evaluation of specific activities and programs in terms of their congruence with the call to mission. The final two steps entail encouraging experimentation in some new avenue of local mission and nurturing a commitment to an ongoing missional way of life.²⁹

One limitation of this model is that it may be misunderstood as a prescriptive recipe for producing missional churches, rather than a pedagogical model that should be shaped to reflect the particular context of the congregation. It should be seen as a model that encourages ongoing experimentation and evaluation. If however this model is applied within the intended theological and missiological frameworks it can serve as an effective means of developing a missional focus, as evidenced by its cultivation of such a focus at Christ Church.

This model and the one presented by Groome share many overlapping features. They both expect the learning process to take time. They both rely on extensive listening and communication. They both assume a deep rootedness in the Christian story and basic

²⁹ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 84-103.

call to mission. Ultimately, they both aim for a lasting change of identity and praxis. Together they have served as a helpful guide for Christ Church and its serious intent to adapt to its changing ministry context, while remaining faithful to its missional calling.

Final Thoughts

The literature reviewed here is pertinent to the profound changes taking place in Western society and the changing context of the Church in a post-Christendom world. There are key adaptive challenges. These involve re-connecting with the de-churched and connecting with the non-churched, which have been described and discussed.

This chapter examined key models in current literature. Specifically, they help the Church move toward a new praxis centered on mission. Using this as a springboard, the discussion now will offer a theological reflection regarding the relationship between Anglican liturgical frameworks and the missional life of Anglican churches seeking to contextualize the gospel.

CHAPTER 4

LITURGICAL FRAMEWORKS AND MISSION

Wherever there is worship, there is liturgy. It may be a liturgy that is intentionally informal and flexible, as often is seen in Pentecostal or Charismatic contexts; or it may be highly scripted with little variation, as is more typical of Orthodox and Roman Catholic contexts. Although different Christian denominations worship the same God, they express their worship differently and often understand the importance and function of liturgy from distinct perspectives.

To say that liturgy is important in an Anglican context is an understatement. It is understood not only to reflect a longstanding tradition of Christian worship, but it is considered a valid means of expressing the most central Christian beliefs and passing those beliefs along to others. Liturgy is not seen as simply the pattern of worship for a given Sunday. It is viewed as a vessel containing, and intricately linked to, Anglican theology and ecclesiology.

As a typical Anglican parish, Christ Church is steeped in traditional liturgical frameworks. However, over the past eight years the parish has taken steps to contextualize its liturgy to address its current missional context in a post-modern, post-Christendom

society. As its pastor, one of my tasks has been to guide this contextualization in such a way that it honors longstanding Anglican theology and ecclesiology while also responding to the Church's call to reach the de-churched and non-churched with the gospel. This task has required the parish to discern what is at the heart of both Anglican traditions and the gospel. Parish leaders have needed to consider what is essential in the liturgy and how that can be expressed in such a way that it remains accessible to people today.

The introduction of the *Book of Alternative Services* in the late 1980s was the parish's first serious attempt at contextualization. In 2004 the development of a contemporary Sunday Eucharist furthered this process, providing a worship service that was more accessible to non-Anglicans. Now the development of Messy Church, aimed at reaching de-churched and non-churched people, is stretching the liturgical frameworks of the parish again. This chapter will examine how key Anglican frameworks as well as the place of Scripture, Sacrament, and ritual can be honored in forms of liturgy contextualized to connect with the de-churched and non-churched.

Liturgical Connections to Theology, Ecclesiology, and Missiology

At its heart good liturgy is theological in that it focuses deeply on God. It must be both devotional and confessional: directed to God and be about God. In *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, Marva Dawn explores the relationship between worship and evangelism. In her critique of much contemporary worship, she reminds the Church that God must be both the object and subject of Christian worship.¹

¹ Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995).

Traditional Anglican liturgy reflects this understanding of worship. For example, the opening “Collect for Purity” directs itself to “Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden.” The sentence, addressed to God, makes it very clear that God is the object of the speaker’s worship. However, this sentence also says key things about God. It tells those who hear it that He is omniscient and knows everything that resides in human hearts and minds. On a broader scale, the sentence reminds the worshipping congregation that worship not only must be addressed to God, but it also should be about Him. In other words, God is the subject of worship.

Additionally, this opening prayer requests that God “cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit.” Again, this request is directed to God as the object of prayer. It focuses on God as the one able to cleanse by His Spirit. So again, God is both the object and subject of worship. This direct address and request together call worshippers to attend fully to who it is they worship, so that they “may perfectly love” Him “and worthily magnify” His “holy name; through Christ our Lord.”²

The opening prayer of praise, referred to as the “Gloria,” has the purpose of again reminding worshippers who it is they have come to worship. It does this by proclaiming God as “Lord, God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father” and “Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.” This solidly Trinitarian prayer, often sung, continues in order to make clear to the worshipper that there is no other god worthy of worship. It reads: “For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the

² General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Collect for Purity,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 185.

Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.”³ Again, the liturgy makes clear who it is being worshipped, as the object of worship, and why worship occurs—ultimately making God’s character and being also the subject of worship. This same focus of God as both object and subject of worship continues in the subsequent parts of the liturgy.

The confessional aspect of liturgy continues in the “Apostle’s Creed”⁴ “Nicene Creed,”⁵ and Eucharistic Prayers of Consecration,⁶ which tell the story of God’s sovereign works across the ages as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Once again, these parts of the liturgy serve to remind liturgical participants of who it is they worship. This happens by describing His deeds across history. These statements are the heart of what Christians confess about God, and they recall the story whenever worship occurs. As confessional statements, in effect they explain why God is worthy of all praise and adoration. Anglican liturgy, therefore, reflects the understanding that worship must be both richly devotional and confessional.

At its heart, good liturgy also reflects not only a rich theology but a deep ecclesiology. In Anglican liturgy the Church as a gathered people, praying a common prayer together, stands in stark contrast to the individualism of the surrounding society. The use of the word “we” throughout the opening “Collect for Purity,” “Gloria,” “Nicene

³ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Gloria,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 186.

⁴ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Apostle’s Creed,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 188-190.

⁵ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Nicene Creed,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 193-210.

⁶ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Eucharistic Prayers 1 to 6,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 193-210.

Creed,” as well as the Confession and the Eucharistic prayers reflects an ecclesiology that sees the local church as a community of disciples. The breadth of this community is extended by the “Prayers of the People,”⁷ a liturgy which focuses on the broader Church and the needs of the surrounding world. The act of sharing “The Peace”⁸ and of gathering around the altar and sharing the one cup during Holy Communion further embodies an ecclesiology of both community and mystical communion.

Anglican liturgy speaks not only to God and about God. It speaks to its participants in worship as one small part of the worldwide Church in which the story of the Last Supper is retold and Christ’s death and resurrection are proclaimed until His coming again. Each Eucharistic prayer includes in some form the “words of institution” taken from Jesus’ words recorded in the Gospels (Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-19; Matthew 26:26-28). Additionally, part way through Eucharistic Prayer 3 the entire congregation joins with the priest saying, “We remember his death, we proclaim his resurrection, we await his coming in glory.”⁹ Both the words of institution and the above response echo Paul’s own recalling of Jesus’ words in his first letter to the Corinthian church and his reminder to them: “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

⁷ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Prayers of the People,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 190.

⁸ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “The Peace,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 192.

⁹ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Eucharistic Prayer 3,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 198.

Finally, at its heart good liturgy also reflects the mission of the Church. The Anglican Eucharist is patterned after the ancient five-fold pattern of worship that concludes with sending out the gathered community to serve God in the world. The “Doxology,” following Communion, is based on Ephesians 3:20-21.¹⁰ It reminds the congregation that it is God’s power “working in us” that can “do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.” As part of the closing words of the liturgy it reminds the worshipping community that it is God’s power working through His people that will accomplish the mission of the Church.

The alternate closing prayer requests that God will enable His people in their task: “May we, who share his body live his risen life; we, who drink his cup, bring life to others; we, whom the Spirit lights, give light to the world.”¹¹ This reminds the worshipper of Paul’s words to the Colossians that they “have been raised with Christ” (Colossians 3:1) and Jesus’ words that they are to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). This prayer concludes with this blessing of hope: “That all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name.” These words give hope to worshippers as they are sent into the world to fulfill their mission. They echo such passages as Paul’s reminder to the Galatians that “for freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1) and Jeremiah’s prophetic promise that “no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying ‘know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me” (Jeremiah 31:34). In a similar vein, the various dismissals echo this focus of the

¹⁰ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Doxology,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 214.

¹¹ Ibid.

community of faith being sent into the world: “Go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit” and “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”¹² Through this liturgy, believers are sent out not only to serve the Lord but are empowered by Him for that service. Traditional Anglican liturgy clearly reflects a call to mission.

The above examples demonstrate that Anglican liturgical frameworks strive to reflect a deep theology, ecclesiology, and missiology. Traditional Anglican worship has done this using lofty and beautiful language that also assumes a thorough familiarity with Scripture and the traditions of the church. It is rich yet at the same time may be quite inaccessible to people who are not already Christians. It even may be inaccessible to people who are not specifically Anglican Christians. Moore, in her justification for the development of new liturgies in the Fresh Expressions movement, describes the practical ways that even beautiful and well-crafted traditional liturgies may be a hindrance to people. She writes: “Ironically, church liturgical rules can also make barriers between a visitor and God. Take saying the Collect every week in an Anglican church, for example. Which of us can remember what we’ve prayed for by the end of it? How long does the Eucharistic Prayer seem to an eight-year old . . . or someone with chronic back pain?”¹³

In a context that increasingly is made up of de-churched and non-churched people, the inaccessibility of liturgy is a serious challenge which various Fresh Expressions of church are attempting to address. For traditional Anglican parishes that launch a Fresh Expression of church, the challenge is to incorporate sound theological, ecclesiological,

¹² General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Dismissal,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 215.

¹³ Moore, *Messy Church*, 18.

and missiological frameworks found in Anglican liturgy and still manage to contextualize liturgy to its new missional context.

This can be done best by focusing less on the specific forms that make up established liturgies and concentrating more on the key goals of liturgy. If a Fresh Expression of church can ensure that its liturgy is directed solidly to God and is about God, then it has achieved its theological goal. If it draws the worshipper into a community of disciples that is part of a broader mystical communion which serves God in the world He loves, then it has achieved its ecclesiological goal. If it can grow disciples of Jesus and encourage them to reach out into the surrounding society with the good news of the gospel, then it has achieved its missiological goal.

The contributing authors of *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, edited by Craig Van Gelder, collectively point out that the Western Church today requires leaders to find a balance between contextualization and confession.¹⁴ The source explores three primary responses congregations have to a changing context. In the first case, churches may seek relevance to the culture to the extent that they lose sight of the distinctive confession of Christ. A second response may be to simply resist change on all levels. The third possible response is to embrace adaptation. Of these three responses, it is proposed that adaptation is needed in order to achieve the balance between contextualization and confession. Scott Fredrickson suggests that congregations need to “carefully consider cultural and contextual changes in the light of the history and traditions of the congregation and denominational tradition. This framework then is used to make selective adaptive

¹⁴ Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Ministry of the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

changes in the congregation's ministry that are in line with the heritage while seeking to respond to the changed context."¹⁵ New contextualized liturgies, as seen in the Fresh Expressions movement, need not abandon the theological, ecclesiological, and missiological frameworks of good liturgy. Rather, they can and should shape new liturgies according to the timeless principles seen in traditional liturgies but adapting the actual forms for the local context.

The Centrality of Scripture and Sacrament in Liturgy

From the earliest beginnings of the Church through the medieval period, the Reformation, and into its more recent history, Christian worship has been defined by the presence of two things: the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the Sacraments. The Acts of the Apostles records how both "the apostles teaching" and "the breaking of bread" were part of Christian practice in the New Testament period (Acts 2:42). While the balance of these two elements has varied significantly within and across different denominations, a focus on the reading and teaching of Scripture and the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism are seen as normative in the life of the Church. In Canadian Anglican churches the reading of four Scripture passages, followed by a sermon based on one or all of these, is typical practice during Sunday worship services. While Eucharist was celebrated every other week or even once a month in many Anglican churches up until the 1980s, parishes have changed their liturgical practices over the past three decades to include Eucharist more frequently. It is now the norm in

¹⁵ Scott Fredrickson, "The Missional Congregation in Context," in *The Missional Church in Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 53.

most Canadian parishes to include Eucharist in its Sunday worship services. For many Anglicans, the inclusion of both Scripture and Sacrament now defines worship and forms the normative parameters of Anglican liturgy.

The reading and teaching of Scripture holds a place of prominence in liturgy, because Scripture is the primary means of learning about God. Psalm 119 in its entirety teaches the centrality of the written word. It reminds the worshipper that they will be kept from shame if they keep God's commandments (Psalm 119:6) and praise Him with an upright heart when they learn his righteous rules (Psalm 119:7). They will keep their way pure by guarding it according to His Word (Psalm 119:9) and that they should long for and delight in God's statutes and testimonies (Psalm 119:20, 24). A well-known verse is Psalm 119:11 in which the psalmist tells God, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." The psalm continues to refer to the good judgment and knowledge that come by knowing the Word of God (Psalm 119: 66) as well as the hope and comfort that it imparts (Psalm 119:49-50). Clearly, for the psalmist, knowing the Word of God was central to knowing both the nature of God and what He asks of us.

In the Old and New Testament the Word of God also is seen as central to knowing about all that God has done and what these deeds have accomplished. In Scripture, human beings learn about God's deeds primarily through the historical books of the Old and New Testaments (Genesis to 2 Chronicles, the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles). In addition to this, the historical portions of the prophetic books and the Psalms also fulfill this role of teaching about God's deeds. This knowledge of God's deeds, however, is not simply for the purpose of information. Psalm 119's emphasis on the shaping of human

behavior also is reflected by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews who states: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The implication here is that Scripture does not simply impart information about events that have occurred but is an active dynamic tool that enables discernment and deeply shapes character.

Besides teaching about God’s deeds throughout history, Scripture also teaches about God’s nature, people’s relationship to Him, and their calling as people living in allegiance to Him. Such teaching is found throughout the New Testament Epistles. For example, Paul writes to the Roman church that nothing can separate them from God’s love (Romans 8:38-39). He writes to the Colossians that Jesus is the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15). He reminds the Christians in Rome that all human beings are sinners, who have been justified by grace as a free gift in Christ (Romans 3:23-25) and that this action of God reveals His righteousness (Romans 3:26). Thus, Scripture is given to teach worshippers about their need of God and all that He has done for them and to encourage them to receive the free gift of grace offered to them.

Scripture also reveals the hope of the final and complete consummation of His Kingdom. Genesis tells the story of humankind’s pulling away from God and banishment from the garden containing the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24). The conclusion of the New Testament, however, tells the story of restored access to the Tree of Life (Revelation 22:2) and the Kingdom, in which “no longer will there be anything accursed, but the

throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him” (Revelation 22:3). For believers, Scripture presents the full story of God and their relationship as human beings to Him. Furthermore, it challenges them to live for Him as He brings about His ultimate purposes in their daily lives.

In *Mandate to Difference*, Walter Brueggemann recalls the Church to a concerted focus on this story as one aspect of the practice of hope. He writes: “The texts of hope make YHWH palpably present in a way that saturates the imagination of Judaism and Christianity, and that empowers emancipatory courage against the kingdom of death.”¹⁶ In short, Scripture must be central to the life of the Church and all Christian worship, because it brings into people’s midst the hope found in the story of God. The hymns and prayers of worship must reflect this story. In this way, Scripture forms the backbone of authentic Christian liturgy.

While the ministry of the Word is central to Christian worship, so is the ministry of Sacrament, which includes both Baptism and Eucharist. For Anglicans, traditionally the Sacrament of Baptism is the rite of initiation into the Church. For Christians it is a means of God’s grace, whereby the new believer is buried with Christ, washed clean, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and begins a new life in Christ. This meaning is founded in Scripture. In his letter to the Christians in Rome Paul states this clearly, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the death by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). The

¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 105.

impact for believers is the realization that just as the glory of God is responsible for Jesus' resurrection, so too they have been given a new life by the glory of God.

The other Sacrament central to Christian worship is Eucharist. As already stated, this is founded in words and actions of Jesus during His final meal with His disciples and was referred to by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. The longstanding tradition within Christianity is that Eucharist is reserved for those who have been baptized. The inclusion of Eucharist into most Anglican Sunday worship services, paired with a rise in the number of non-Christian people in the population, has raised the dilemma of what to do about people present for worship who are not baptized. Some Anglican churches now practice the Open Table, which welcomes everyone present, baptized or not, to receive Holy Communion. Others simply fail to stipulate conditions for receiving Communion and turn a blind eye to the fact that non-baptized people are receiving the bread and wine. In April 2011, the Canadian Anglican House of Bishops re-affirmed that Baptism is the normative prerequisite for receiving Holy Communion, following the long tradition of the Church.¹⁷ The fact that the bishops issued such a statement points to the pressures exerted by the post-Christendom context on parishes. The willingness of a significant number of those parishes to vary from longstanding Christian practices is an attempt to respond to that context.

All of this raises the important issue of what balance of Scripture and Sacrament is necessary to offer liturgy that is both true to its Anglican heritage and appropriately

¹⁷ Diana Swift, "No Eucharist Before Communion Bishops Affirm," *The Anglican Journal*, April 2011, <http://www.anglicanjournal.com/nc/news-update-items/article/no-eucharist-baptism-bishops-affirm-9693.html> (accessed November 12, 2011).

contextualized to the current Canadian context. Perhaps what is needed is the development of more liturgies focused intentionally on the ministry of the Word and contextualized for de-churched and non-churched people. This is the approach that many Fresh Expressions are taking as they seek to develop relationships with the de-churched and non-churched and to share with them the basic story of Scripture. In order to address and engage the missional context in which they find themselves, churches will need to re-embrace the ministry of the Word by itself and without the celebration of Eucharist as a completely valid form of Anglican worship.

The Place of the Visual and Performing Arts in Liturgy

As established in Chapter 1 of this project, throughout modernity humans were viewed primarily as autonomous and thinking individuals. The Church under the influence of modernity placed a heavy emphasis on the interior spiritual life of individuals and their thoughts about God. Propositional statements of faith were the order of the day, with various sects and denominations being defined by their distinctive foundational doctrines. There was a heavy emphasis on a rational appropriation and affirmation of key tenets of the faith. Liturgy in this context became more focused on the telling and affirming of these key tenets. The worship environment, especially in Protestant denominations reacting to the liturgies of medieval Christianity, often was plain and even austere. Icons, incense, genuflecting, vestments, and processions were eschewed. Long sermons and simple, functional furnishings were considered preferable.

In contrast, post-modernity has been marked by recognition of the inter-connectedness of the rational, emotional, and physical aspects of human beings.¹⁸ For this reason, there is increased interest in liturgy that involves not only listening, affirming, and mentally applying key Christian teachings but liturgy that encourages active participation and the inclusion of visual, auditory, olfactory, and kinesthetic modes of experience. Liturgical dance, colorful banners, beautiful buildings, and scented candles are finding their way into denominations whose worship was previously and intentionally unadorned. In *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* James K. A. Smith describes a recent post-modern worship scene that clearly is aimed at engaging people on more than a rational level:

Members of the congregation are faced by others: they see and are seen by others, which reminds them of the iconic gaze of God, who confronts us in the other. The worship space is also organized by dynamics of light and darkness: surrealist stained glass casts a colored light and shadow from chapel stations on the fringes of the sanctuary. Several screens display shifting digital images that function as a kind of digital glass of images drawing us into worship. Like traditional icons—which can be found in one of the side chapels—these digital images function as windows to transcendence.¹⁹

Anglicanism as a whole never focused entirely on the rational. Traditionally, Anglican worship has engaged all the senses in worship. It long has included beautiful music, stained glass, vestments, altar linens, processions, and lovely Communion vessels. It has required active participation through common prayer, gathering at the altar to receive Communion, and frequent changes of body posture—for example, collectively standing for praise, sitting for teaching, and kneeling for prayer. Perhaps this is one reason

¹⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 136.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

why in this post-modern context traditional Anglican liturgy is being re-discovered and celebrated by Christians brought up in other denominations.

A holistic embrace of all the senses in liturgy also is seen in the Fresh Expressions movement. Whether sharing a meal, baking bread together, talking over cappuccinos, skateboarding to loud music, or creating pictures with finger paints, these experiments in Christian worship invariably are multi-sensory and participatory. They involve artistic expression through music, art, and cooking. They involve bodily movement through dance, drama, games, and sports. The gospel is being shared through all these avenues, with the story of Scripture told via DVD clips, biblical storytelling, musical presentations, and puppetry. It may not look like traditional Anglican liturgy; but by incorporating a variety of senses and body postures in worship, Fresh Expressions of church certainly share common ground with traditional Anglican Sunday worship.

Power of Patterns and Rituals

Liturgy is not just a form and vessel of worship. It is a cultivator of particular patterns and rituals. Patterns and rituals have the power to influence and shape people. They have this power because they appeal to something in human nature that finds comfort in the known, the predictable, and the repeated. Part of the power of patterns and rituals is to nurture an identity with and sense of belonging to organizations or communities. For example, the singing of national anthems nurtures a sense of belonging to a given country. The wearing of team colors or the singing of a school song nurtures identity with that group, even when the song itself is ridiculous.

In a similar way the patterns and rituals of liturgy foster a sense of identity with and belonging to a community of faith. Recognizing and participating in the patterns and rituals of worship makes participants a living part of the liturgy. The weekly repetition allows a deeper familiarity with, and even memorization of, what is repeated.

Such patterns and rituals of worship are found throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the command to keep the weekly Sabbath holy generation after generation (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:16; Leviticus 23:3). Another example is seen in God's command for the Israelites to observe particular feast days each year including the Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23).

In the New Testament such regular worship patterns can be seen in Jesus' early life as He was taken by His parents to be presented to God at the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22). Later, His parents bring Him to the Temple for the Feast of Passover when He reaches the age of twelve (Luke 2:41-50). The text makes it clear that this was an annual tradition and pattern of worship for the family (Luke 2:41). On this occasion, however, Jesus stays behind to learn and discuss with the teachers at the Temple. While there is no evidence of formal schooling outside the home, Jesus' extensive prior knowledge of the faith is evident to these teachers (Luke 2:46-47). Such instruction of children in the home paired with a belonging to a faith community is a longstanding pattern in Jewish tradition. In the Book of Deuteronomy when the Israelites are reminded of the central commandments of God, they are instructed, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down

and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7). This command is repeated almost verbatim in Deuteronomy 11:19-21. It is clear from these passages that religious instruction of children is given as a task to parents as part of the patterns and rituals of the faith community.

The patterns of worship Jesus first learned as a child are seen further at the beginning of His public ministry. The Gospel of Luke records that He observed the Sabbath by going to His local synagogue where He read from the Hebrew Scriptures and expounded on the reading, as was the custom (Luke 4:16-20). Jesus also observed adult Jewish feast days, such as the Feast of Booths and the Passover. The Gospels tell about His travels to Jerusalem for these events even when it was dangerous for Him to do so (John 7:2-10). Later in Paul’s epistles the observance of regular patterns of worship also are seen among the first Christian communities who meet to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:15-16). In the letter to the Hebrews the writer reminds Christians to be careful not to neglect meeting regularly (Hebrews 10:25). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke records the same: “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread” (Acts 20:7). All of these Scriptures point to patterns and rituals within worship that were considered normative throughout the Old and New Testaments.

In traditional Anglican worship, patterns and rituals are also normative. Weekly repetition includes the Lord’s Prayer, which highlights the importance of prayer to Jesus and teaches the pattern of prayer as He taught it to the disciples (Luke 11:1-4); the Creed, which encapsulates Christian beliefs; the Confession, which remind believers of their true standing before God (1 John 1:9); and the Eucharistic Prayers, which remind of all that God has done in Christ (Colossians 1:21-22). In addition to these, many Anglicans

learned Psalm 95 through the repetition of the Anglican liturgy of “Morning Prayer,” without realizing that it was Psalm 95.²⁰ This is because in the liturgy it is referred to as the “Venite,” the Latin name for one of the main invitatory psalms used in the liturgy. Many Anglicans actually have memorized significant amounts of Scripture without intentionally seeking to do so. It just happened through repetition. Patterns and rituals help shape people, and they are very much a part of traditional Anglican worship.

Contextualization of key patterns and rituals of Anglican liturgy can happen through focusing on the pattern of worship and the key elements it contains. For example, a Fresh Expression of church can use a meaningful and recognizable call to worship, contextualized for the particular setting and people. This may mean turning up the music even louder at the skateboard church, passing out the scones at a café church, or honking a funny-sounding horn at a Messy Church gathering. Similarly, the ministry of the Word can be introduced with a particular pattern. The Prayers of the People may start with some small ritual specific to the context; there may be a particular song sung at the closing or perhaps the joining of hands to recite “The Grace.”²¹ The recognition that word, phrases, and rituals are important does not mean that the exact patterns and rituals of traditional worship need to be transposed directly into Fresh Expressions of church. Rather, it means that in these contexts patterns and rituals can be incorporated in new ways. Scripture and long-held Christian symbols, such as the cross, light, water, fire, bread, and wine can be included in a way that is appropriate to that context of ministry.

²⁰ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Morning Prayer,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 49.

²¹ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, “The Grace,” in *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 185.

The Relationship between Liturgy and Discipleship

Modernity viewed proper learning as primarily a cerebral activity, which occurred through listening or reading and then thinking about and absorbing a subject as an individual. Post-modernity is reclaiming an ancient view of learning as a holistic activity involving not only listening and reading but experiencing, exploring, discussing, and creating—often in the context of a group. This change in the way learning is viewed also affects Christian views about how people become disciples of Jesus.

While it is true that people's knowledge of God can lead them to worship Him (Psalm 95:1-7), it is also true that worship can lead to the development of beliefs. By participating in the faith community, including its worship, seekers can become disciples. Jesus invited people first to follow Him. In doing so, they joined a community that lived and learned together. This, in turn, led to their learning of a new way of life. Perhaps this same process is being especially reclaimed in today's post-modern context. In *The Great Giveaway*, David Fitch writes:

Post-moderns will be saved through “osmosis” as opposed to one-on-one persuasion. Post-moderns therefore will learn the truth by coming into the community of Christ, inhabiting it, living within it, and gradually learning the language by which we speak. The words of Christian truth start to make sense as they are spoken and used among people.²²

Just as Jesus' disciples grew into an understanding of who He was and the significance of His life, perhaps this is again how many people will come to be followers of Christ. Fitch stresses that lived reality is what people in a post-modern context want to see. He continues:

In postmodernity, evangelism should happen in fully embodied Christian worship. In worship, Christians present salvation, not in a rationalized cognitive word only,

²² David Fitch, *The Great Giveaway* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 56.

but in the rich display of mighty acts in symbol and art. . . . As with postmodernity, worship embraces mystery, body, soul, and spirit. It springs forth out of the depths of its traditions and brings the ancient into the future.²³

In other words, worship is inherently evangelistic, even as it is centered in and on God.

Worship also enables people to become acquainted with and grounded in Scripture. As people hear Scripture read, explained, and applied during worship they have an opportunity to grow in their familiarity and understanding of it. In the Early Church, believers devoted themselves to “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). As seekers do the same today, they are exposed to what the Bible teaches about who they are in relation to God (His workmanship) and their ultimate calling to serve Him (by doing good works), as expressed in Ephesians 2:10.

When Scripture is included in the liturgy, and repeated weekly as an act of worship, it can become deeply embedded. For example, an elderly woman in my parish who developed Alzheimer’s disease still recited several of the psalms when she was unable to utter any other intelligible vocalizations. She had learned them in the weekly pattern of worship. When I worked as a speech and language pathologist, prior to ordained ministry, I consulted with many patients who, although unable to speak due to the effects of a stroke, were able to recite the Lord’s Prayer or Psalm 23. They had learned them in the weekly pattern of worship. It seems the repetition and music of worship lends itself well to the setting down of deep memory. Worship not only is offered to God by disciples; it is used by God to make disciples.

²³ Ibid., 65.

In *Becoming Friends*, Paul J. Wadell explores the role of liturgy and worship in teaching and forming believers by contrasting “sham worship” with “authentic worship.”²⁴ Sham worship soothes and entertains; it focuses on celebrating and complimenting the participant. Authentic worship, he suggests, forms people into a community whose shared life “contradicts and challenges some of the values, customs, and practices of society not only to call attention to something that might be false and harmful but also to point to something much more graceful and promising.”²⁵ Wadell believes discipleship is not developed in the confines of a specific course, program, or Bible Study group; rather, it is formed in the full life of the Christian community gathered, of which worship is the main element. In short, liturgy can be a key force in forming people who live by a different story.

It remains to be determined how this relationship between liturgy and discipleship can be lived out best in the life of new forms of worship, such as Fresh Expressions of church. It definitely means shaping worship in its various contexts to intentionally include key Christian teachings and practices. It also will require that a distinctly Christian culture be developed within the worshipping community. Graham Tomlin says that this will be a particular challenge for Fresh Expressions of church. He writes:

As important as it is to respond to particular cultural forms, fresh expressions of church will need to pay close, if not closer attention to putting in place the proper culture of church, thinking about how to create communities in different social or cultural contexts that are capable of producing “people of virtue.” Beyond the task of changing times and spaces for meeting to fit in with particular ways of life, over and above the need to find forms of worship that express the faith in different settings, or the need to communicate the faith in culturally relevant ways, is the need to establish a true ecclesial culture that is focused upon the

²⁴ Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 18-22.

²⁵ Ibid., 29.

cultivation of certain habits of life, what some moral traditions would call virtue, or what the New Testament might call the fruits of the Spirit.²⁶

Liturgy alone cannot be asked to bear the full burden of making disciples. However, if the liturgy can be contextualized in such a way that people can engage in it with meaning, they just might be able to absorb and learn the Christian story in that context. They also will be better able to grow in their own sense of association with that story. Learning the Christian story is the start of becoming a disciple of Jesus. A further step can happen when people associate themselves and then align themselves with that story. A final step is when they start becoming deeply transformed by it.

In post-modernity becoming a disciple of Jesus is seen less as a one-time rational decision and more as a process shaped by worship, study, outreach, and fellowship. In considering the non-churched people who may come to be a part of a Fresh Expression of church, Moore comments:

In our communities today, there are plenty of people who are searching spiritually and physically. There are people of all ages with spiritual needs, who feel “there must be more to life than this” or who have a sense of something greater than an Xbox 360 or a widescreen TV. There are plenty of people who have definite physical needs, too: they need a good solid meal, or perhaps a hug, a conversation where they’re really listened to or the chance to put their feet up and have a cup of tea in peace. Maybe, when they meet both Jesus and his people together with that cup of tea, they’ll stay longer than they’d planned. Not disciples, then. Not ready to take up their cross, any more than the sacrifice of time and effort to get to Messy Church and have to wash a pile of paint-splattered school jumpers, but they are followers on the messy edge, willing to hear more about Jesus.²⁷

²⁶ Graham Tomlin, “Can We Develop Churches That Can Transform the Culture?” in *Mission-Shaped Questions*, ed. Steven Croft (London: Church House Publishing, 2008), 72-73.

²⁷ Moore, *Messy Church*, 42-43.

If the Anglican Church is to take seriously the call to connect with de-churched and non-churched people, Anglican parishes will need to take seriously their responsibility to develop liturgies and communities that will help such people know, love, and serve Jesus.

In summary, the importance of liturgy in traditional Anglican worship need not be lost in liturgy that strives to be both deeply confessional and thoroughly contextualized for its specific context. By placing Scripture at its center and by including and adapting key elements, patterns, and rituals of Christian worship, liturgies can be developed that will enable churches to connect with de-churched and non-churched people while still respecting the solid frameworks of traditional liturgy. Furthermore, such liturgies not only will be worshipful, they will be fruitful in leading people closer to Christ and teaching them what it means to live as His disciples. This study now will examine a specific example of this as it is lived out in Messy Church gatherings at Christ Church, Oshawa.

PART THREE

THE MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 5

A DESCRIPTION OF MESSY CHURCH

Messy Church is a monthly Saturday morning gathering of parents, grandparents, and their children. It is a worship and learning experience that engages participants in songs, games, crafts, and prayers focused around a particular story from the Bible. It is “messy” in the sense that it is highly flexible and so at times chaotic. It is actively participatory and sometimes loud. It is dynamic, shifting focus from one activity to another about every five to ten minutes. It involves paint, glue, and stickers that often end up on clothing and furniture. Some Christians may feel that such messiness cannot possibly be authentic worship. However, Moore reminds believers of the chaos and dynamism that was part of ancient Jewish worship.

It’s interesting to imagine how messy ancient Old Testament Jewish worship must have been: the animals and birds on the altar, crumbled cakes with oil poured over the top, fires, water sloshing around, incense smoking away, fat and kidneys being butchered up, the priest showering everyone with blood from the sacrifice. You only have to read the opening chapters of Leviticus to see that God’s priority cannot be a clean carpet. We’d never get away with that level of mess in our church: the wardens would have kittens. Surely God doesn’t notice mess in that sense. What God notices is how the worship is honouring to him and how it draws people closer to him. Our responsibility isn’t to make worship neat and tidy but to make it the best we can offer and as genuine, relevant, living and

Christ-centered as we are able to—and to exercise our ministry of hoovering afterwards.¹

Messy Church is a multi-sensory experience. It involves drinking coffee, making music, watching movie clips, running relay races, playing parachute games, and gleefully creating with finger paints, glue, water, sand, and various other untidy substances. The first Messy Church at Christ Church, Oshawa, was held in May 2008. This chapter will describe the setting and format of this Fresh Expression of church as it is experienced in this parish. The essential role of parents and grandparents will be examined as well as the purpose of the various take-home resources. Finally, the leadership team and their roles at Messy Church will be explained.

The Setting and Set-up for Messy Church

Like other Fresh Expressions, Messy Church takes place in a context very different from a typical Anglican liturgy of worship. For this reason, it is important to describe in detail both the physical setting and set-up requirements for this liturgy. Furthermore, since a variety of congregations throughout the UK and Canada now offer Messy Church in various forms, it is important to explain what is involved in Christ Church's particular offering of this Fresh Expression. For example, Messy Church at Christ Church is very intentional about reinforcing the biblical role of parents and grandparents as Christian educators of their children. Several aspects of its set-up reflect this emphasis.

Messy Church typically takes place in the lower level of Christ Church's building, located at 81 Hillcroft Street in Oshawa. Upstairs in the main entryway, a flipchart sign

¹ Moore, *Messy Church*, 30.

welcomes everyone to Messy Church and directs them downstairs. There is a small table set up in this area with a compact-disc player on it. The rooms used for Messy Church are situated directly below the main sanctuary of the church. Since this lower level is used throughout the school year as a non-profit nursery school run by Christ Church, it is ideal for the many activities of Messy Church. The locale has a combination of carpeted and tile floor space as well as brightly decorated walls, windows, and bulletin boards. This level of the church also is equipped with a full kitchen and two multi-stall bathrooms.

Three large rooms are used for Messy Church. One is a carpeted and tiled room used for the large-group gathering and closing sessions of Messy Church. The second, also carpeted and tiled, is used for games and crafts geared toward children ages two to six and their families. This area also offers a free-play area for younger siblings; and one side of this room is a nursery equipped with a change table, crib, and rocking chair. This accommodation is ideal for mothers who may want to breastfeed infants. The third room used during Messy Church is a tiled room utilized for the games and crafts geared toward children aged seven to eleven and their families. Parents and grandparents can move easily at any time from room to room on the whole lower level, participating with their kids, taking a toddler to the bathroom, or heating up a bottle for their baby.

The above spaces each have their own specific set-up requirements. The large-group room contains both adult- and child-sized chairs arranged in expanding semi-circles, a projection screen, a DVD and VHS player, and a compact-disc player. The carpeted area in this room forms the focal point around which the gathering and closing sessions happen.

Many of the children choose to sit on the carpeted area rather than in chairs, but some of the shy ones prefer to sit next to their parents or grandparents.

The two game and craft rooms are arranged with these two purposes in mind: to mix open space for the games and to host child-sized tables and chairs for the crafts. The games and craft supplies are set up ahead of time to speed ease of transition from one activity to another. This area is beneficial, because it allows all ages of children to be present and participate in the liturgy as they are able. Those that take longer to settle into the craft or those that finish early still can be present in the same space.

After families go downstairs to the lower level where Messy Church takes place, they gather in an entry area of one of the main rooms designated for reception with a small table for registration and picking up name tags. This area also is used to give out take-home activity resources at the end of Messy Church. Just beyond this area is a table that functions as the lending library. It displays a variety of books, children's Bibles, movies, and music geared to children ages two to twelve years. This table also offers several books for parents focused on nurturing faith at home or parenting strategies. This serves to engage parents and grandparents further in the important connection between Messy Church gatherings and their role as key religious educators of their children.

Just before entering the large-group room used for beginning and ending Messy Church, there is a refreshments table with two coffee pots, cups, sugar, cream, apple juice, and water. While Messy Church gatherings in other contexts include a meal, Christ Church chooses not to do this since some of the children attending have serious food

allergies. This decision along with others—such as day, time, and frequency of Messy Church—were based on what parents said would work best for them.

Next to the refreshments table is a carpeted free-play area with a fabric tunnel, small plastic slide, and a small table with some toys displayed on it. This space is where parents and kids can relax before Messy Church begins (and after an often hectic time getting the family all ready and out the door). The children and parents reconnect with one another and can stretch and run about before everyone gathers in the large-group room. The purpose of this area is to serve as an informal gathering spot for the Messy Church community.

Overall, set-up for Messy Church takes up to two hours. The key planning leader usually does a partial set-up the evening before Messy Church, assisted by one or two other team members. The final set-up of craft supplies, toys, and refreshments is done during the hour before the first families arrive. Messy Church team members are encouraged to arrive half an hour before the start time of 10:30 a.m. This allows them time to review the tasks for which they are responsible at that month's gathering.

The Format of Messy Church

Like the setting and set-up for Messy Church, the format is very intentional and incorporates the following emphases: flexibility for various ages and abilities to participate as fully as possible in the worship, the importance of patterns and rituals in worship, encouragement of the role of parents and grandparents as Christian educators of children, and the faithful presentation of a story from the Bible as central to the worship. With these goals in mind, the format offers variation from month to month but within a stable framework described below.

As families arrive and enter through the main doors of the church building, they see the Messy Church sign and hear children's worship songs playing in that area. After moving to the lower level of the building they are welcomed as a family and are invited to sign in. If families have attended Messy Church before, they pick up their name tags stored by family in a hanging display. If they are a family that is new to Messy Church, they register and stick on temporary name tags.

Families generally gather between 10:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. on the Saturdays that Messy Church happens. This is the normal gathering time for free play and chatting over coffee or juice. This takes place in the main game and craft room, which also houses the entry space, lending library, refreshments table, and free-play area. Children enjoy the toys and one another as other families arrive. The mini-stilts, hammering bench, bean-bag toss, and Noah's Ark shape sorter are the favorites. Parents drink coffee and fellowship with other parents or enjoy time with their children. This helps them bond and to lay the groundwork for spiritual dialogue and activity later.

The start of Messy Church is signaled with the blowing of a funny-sounding rubber horn, which prompts everyone to migrate into the large-group room. Once the majority of families are gathered, the service begins with an opening prayer. This informal and short extemporaneous prayer gives thanks for everyone present and also includes a few special current needs in the city, country, or broader world. Then it is time to sing the Messy Church version of the "Gloria," as an Anglican opening song of praise. Just as the "Gloria" is sung towards the beginning of every Eucharist at Sunday worship services, each month at Messy

Church congregants sing *Rise and Shine* with accompanying actions.² No one seems to mind the repetition. In fact, it helps to establish a pattern of worship that families recognize and quickly join in. One little girl in particular often comes into the large-group room singing it in anticipation. After this worship song, one other song already familiar to the families is sung. To provide variety in music and theological content, the melodies alternate among *This Little Light of Mine*, *The B-I-B-L-E*, *Father Abraham*, *Nothing is Impossible with God*,³ or one of the many others learned over the three years since Messy Church began. The purpose of these songs is to worship God together, allowing all ages to participate.

The singing is followed by an introduction to the Bible story of the day. This usually revolves around a key concept or idea related to the story. Often the introduction incorporates two puppets, “Simon Sheep” and “Liam Lamb.” These puppets help draw the children into the introductory concepts that will be explored in the biblical story and signal for the children a move from singing to discussion. Representing characters seen each month, these puppets also serve to set up a recognizable visual pattern for those participating in Messy Church. The children have come to associate the puppets with a lead-in that prepares them for the Bible story of the day. Other tangible items—such as a water table, green and red traffic lights, or toy cars and a roadmap—also may be used for the purpose of teaching particular concepts using concrete objects the children can see

² *Rise and Shine*, in *Sing-Along-Bible Songs*, performed and arranged by David Lornson, produced by Elliott Delman Publications, CD, 2002, no. 2.

³ *This Little Light of Mine*, in *My Big Box of Split-Track Bible Songs*, produced by Stephen Elkins, Wonder Workshop, CD, 2009, no. 12; *The B-I-B-L-E*, in *My Big Box of Split-Track Bible Songs*, produced by Stephen Elkins, Wonder Workshop, CD, 2009, no. 4; *Father Abraham*, in *My Big Box of Split-Track Bible Songs*, produced by Stephen Elkins, Wonder Workshop, CD, 2009, no. 2; *Nothing is Impossible with God*, in *100 Bible Stories and 100 Bible Songs*, produced by Stephen Elkins, Wonder Workshop, DVD 5, 2007, no. 6.

and experience. For example, the water table and paper wicker baskets were used to demonstrate what floating means, in preparation to tell the story of the infant Moses being placed in the Nile. Ultimately, the introduction ensures that the children understand key vocabulary or concepts in the Bible story that is about to be told. It also allows the introduction of key teachings about the nature of God or human relationship to Him.

The Bible story that forms the focus for each month's Messy Church then is told. The story is conveyed in at least two ways: using a simple storytelling mode or through large story books, drama, movie clips, PowerPoint pictures, and text. Since the story is presented employing language and concepts accessible to young children, it is also accessible to parents who may have no knowledge of the story. The story is told using two different means to ensure that both the auditory and visual learners can grasp the heart of the story. It is also hoped that the repetition will enable greater retention.

Following the Bible story, a new song related to the story usually is taught. Sometimes musical instruments, banners, or flags are passed out for the children to play, hold up, or wave as they listen to the new song. New songs often are repeated at the final large-group gathering of Messy Church to help the families remember them and join in.

After the singing, those gathered move on to the games and crafts related to the Bible story. This is when the children aged two to six and those aged seven to twelve divide into the other two main rooms. Initially, Messy Church focused on families with children in the younger age range; but after the first two years of meeting, families began requesting that this focus expand, because their other sons and daughters wanted to attend but found the games and crafts too juvenile. In September 2010, Christ Church expanded

Messy Church to include two age-focused avenues: one aimed at children ages two to six years old and one for children ages seven to eleven.

Games at Messy Church involve whole-body movement in order to help children learn. Whole-body games are employed not only for the fun factor but to incorporate key elements from the Bible story for that same day. Favorite games are played across the months at Messy Church, but these games incorporate slightly different elements.

Many versions of “musical chairs,” “pin the tail,” relay races, and parachute games are used. Each game incorporates some key elements from the Bible story of that day. For example, when the story of the Last Supper was told (cf. Luke 22:14-20 and John 13:1-11), the children played a version of musical chairs. In this version, when the music stopped, the children had to run to stand on large colorful cut-outs of bread, wine, or feet taped to the floor. This game reminded the children of two key elements in the story: the sharing of wine and bread and Jesus’ washing his disciples’ feet. When telling the story of Jacob (cf. Genesis 25 to 35), they followed markings on the floor to each of several stations which described an event on Jacob’s life-journey. The children received a sticker on their “Jacob’s Journey Passport” at each station.

Another game involved the children and parents walking between two large room dividers positioned close together so as to make a sort of narrow path. The dividers were covered in blue paper and cut-outs of fish, coral, seaweed, and starfish to help the children envision the Israelites passing through the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 14). To teach about Moses’ birth and infancy, the children climbed in baskets and their parents raced

them down the Nile River, outlined in blue tape on the floor and set up with toy alligators, plastic reeds, and bulrushes (cf. Exodus 2:1-10).

After the game is over, the families begin the craft for the day. The timing of this change of activity varies depending on the children's attention span and the number of unforeseen consequences that arise. The craft is the lengthiest part of Messy Church, as the families create something together they will take home that is related to the story of the day. The crafts often involve cutting, pasting, brush painting, sand art, finger painting, paper weaving, and molding clay. The families have made wind chimes, paintings, pop-up art, paper animals, and shoebox showcases. Parents sit with their children and help them do the craft, talk with them about the story, and instruct them not to eat the paste. Inevitably, the craft time is not only the lengthiest part of Messy Church but the messiest and most creative. The purpose is to reinforce the story of the day by teaching again key elements from Scripture, thereby serving as part of the ministry of the Word.

At about 11:25 a.m. the Messy Church horn signals again to gather everyone from the two craft and game rooms back into the large-group room. The closing gathering includes the following: Bible recap, closing prayer, and dismissal. The purpose of this is to emphasize again the story told from Scripture and to bring the time of worship and learning to its conclusion with a Messy Church version of the closing Anglican liturgy.

To begin concluding Messy Church, team leaders briefly recap the Bible story. They usually use some open-ended questions to engage the children. Then, a brief extemporaneous prayer is prayed, thanking God for gathering attenders for another Messy Church. They ask Him to be with all the families during the upcoming month. A closing

song or two is sung. Again, if a song is played with which the families are not familiar, musical instruments are distributed for the children to use—including clappers, triangles, bells, and cymbals. Sometimes the music is on a compact disc or a guitar leads the worship.

The conclusion to Messy Church involves everyone present getting into a large circle. “The Grace,” used at the opening of the traditional Anglican Eucharist and taken from 2 Corinthians 13:14, is said while the accompanying actions are done. Table 1 reflects the whole-body movement as it pairs with the elements of “The Grace”:

Table 1. Whole-body Movement for “The Grace” Liturgy

“The Grace”	<i>Open hand turned upward and swept from one side to the other</i>
“of our Lord Jesus Christ”	<i>pointing upward with index finger</i>
“and the love of God”	<i>both arms crossed over the chest</i>
“and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”	<i>all join hands around the circle</i>
be with us all evermore. Amen!”	<i>as “Amen” is said everyone raises their hands high</i>

The Messy Church version of “The Grace” is not especially reverential, but it is quite enthusiastic, authentic, and heartfelt.

The final dismissal at Messy Church consists of an informal goodbye and an invitation to come back again next month. There also may be an announcement or two if some special event is happening in the parish or if there is a new resource in the lending library. This final dismissal happens as close to 11:30 a.m. as possible, although it often occurs as late as 11:45 a.m. Moreover, there can be more time for children’s free play as parents pick up the take-home resources or sign out books from the lending library. The team begins to dismantle the areas and supplies set-up for Messy Church. To return the space to how it was found normally takes anywhere from thirty to forty-five minutes.

The Essential Role of Parents and Grandparents at Messy Church

As previously established, parents long have held a key role in teaching children about faith in Jewish tradition (cf. Deuteronomy 11:19). Messy Church desires to emphasize this role of parents by creating a multigenerational liturgy that families can come to and participate in together. For this reason, Messy Church is not a drop-off program for children. It is a collaborative worship and learning experience for families. The central role of grandparents and parents in interacting with their children at Messy Church is seen throughout all aspects of the liturgy.

At least one parent or grandparent must be present with their children or grandchildren throughout Messy Church. Unless people are part of the leadership team, they must have a child with them. This rule is in place for one primary reason: Messy Church is a cross-generational liturgy intended to nurture families in the faith. Christ Church does not want it to be seen simply as a kids' program where parents can leave their children at for an hour on Saturday mornings. Christ Church's goal is to encourage parents and grandparents to understand their God-given identity as key spiritual influencers. Messy Church is intended to reposition parents and grandparents as thoroughly involved in their children's Christian education. By offering Messy Church, Christ Church's goal is not to plant people in the pews on Sundays but rather to nurture faith and spiritual growth in the home and to build connections with de-churched and non-churched people while doing so.

Mark Holmen, in *Faith Begins at Home*, examines the essential role that parents and grandparents play in the faith development of their children and grandchildren.⁴ He

⁴ Mark Holmen, *Faith Begins At Home* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005).

cites results of a 1990 survey conducted by the Search Institute, a non-profit research and educational organization located in Minneapolis. This survey examined what factors influenced teens in their faith. Holman notes that teens themselves reported that their mother and then their father were the top two most significant religious influences.⁵ Grandparents also were in the top five, tied with a regularly attended youth group. Clearly family is a powerful context in which to learn about faith.

As previously noted, this role of parents is rooted solidly in the practices of ancient Judaism, and in the Bible itself, which speaks of parents teaching their children the faith. However, in many Christian homes this primary role of parents has been subtly undermined, often by the very churches attended by these families. In her discussion of the role of family in faith development, Moore notes:

The Church has traditionally taken over the role of parents and carers in bringing up children to follow Jesus, and has elbowed the carers out into a position of powerlessness. Christian education is done in church, isn't it? At Sunday school? We're not qualified to do it at home: we'll leave it to the experts . . . so many of us are left not knowing how to go about bringing up our children in a Christian home, because no one ever read the Bible to us when we were little, or prayed with us, or felt that anything more than taking us to church and getting us confirmed was required.⁶

This key role of parents also is highlighted by Marjorie Thompson in *Family: The Forming Center*. She writes: "For all their specialized training, church professionals realize that if a child is not receiving basic Christian nurture in the home, even the best

⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁶ Lucy Moore, *Messy Church 2* (Abingdon, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2008), 21.

teachers and curriculum will have minimal impact. Once-a-week exposure simply cannot compete with daily experience where personal formation is concerned.”⁷

If weekly exposure is not enough to profoundly influence children, there certainly can be no illusions about Messy Church being able to do this. The best hope is that Messy Church can teach ten key Bible stories per year to families, build a sense of community among these families, equip parents and grandparents to talk to their children and grandchildren about God, and teach them to pray with one another. By reinforcing the idea that parents and grandparents are the key influencers in their children’s faith development, it is hoped they too will grow in their own faith and relationship with Jesus. Another goal is that when their children and grandchildren are too old for Messy Church, these families will have enough of a relationship with Christ Church that they may already be participating in the life of the parish in some other way and so become more fully integrated into the parish.

The idea that clergy and Sunday school teachers are best at teaching children about God is an idea that still is very entrenched in many Anglican churches. A little history can be instructive to such churches in this matter. As many older members at Christ Church recall, during the 1950s and early 1960s Anglican Sunday schools were overflowing.⁸ Parents firmly believed that bringing their children to Sunday school was the best way to nurture faith. However, it is important to recognize that it is precisely these children who now stay away from the Church in droves. Clearly the professionalized academic model of

⁷ Marjorie Thompson, *Family: The Forming Center* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1996), back cover.

⁸ Adam, interview by author.

Christian education failed. With the focus of Messy Church being on the home as the key center for nurturing faith, it is hoped that a return to the ancient Jewish practice of families teaching their children can be encouraged. Parents and grandparents are uniquely positioned to teach children about God's mighty deeds and His calling of a people to live according to His ways. In a post-Christendom context the home once again should be the center for religious instruction, modeling, nurture, and practice.

Besides being key influences in the lives of their grandchildren, grandparents now occupy a special place as Christian educators for another reason. Many of their own children no longer attend church. In many families the parents, although brought to church by their parents, no longer have any connection with a faith community. They fall into the growing ranks of the de-churched. Their own children are completely non-churched. Grandparents can fill the void in Christian education by teaching their grandchildren about the faith, and by modeling Christian behaviors for them. In addition to this, by participating with them in a worship and learning experience like Messy Church, the grandparents have an opportunity to teach about worship with the full approval of their own children. Although not willing to attend church anywhere themselves, they generally do not mind if "Grandma" takes the children one Saturday morning a month.

Some might question why parents and grandparents cannot fulfill this role of being Christian educators, simply through individual instruction of their children and grandchildren. One answer is that Messy Church offers the same key difference that Sunday church offers: the gathered community. In addition to this, like Sunday worship services, Messy Church offers families a service that already is planned. It also gives

them a variety of activities to do with their children and grandchildren, without the burden of having to purchase supplies and think up games and crafts. Finally, Messy Church allows them to do this in the context of other families gathered. This makes worship and learning more engaging for everyone.

Take-Home Resources and Their Purpose

As previously noted, the home is considered in Scripture to be a primary setting for the religious education of children. It is there they develop an understanding of the existence or non-existence of God. In de-churched and non-churched families alike, parents exert primary influence on their children's spiritual development. It is possible that the children in such homes can learn about Jesus through other avenues; but that does not negate the profound power and influence that the parents' faith, or lack of faith, have on their offspring. For this reason, at Messy Church one goal is to support parents and grandparents in this role with as many resources as possible. It is hoped that in the case of both de-churched and non-churched parents, the take-home resources will stimulate them to consider, explore, and grow more in their own relationship with God. With this in mind, four types of take-home resources are offered to families.

The first of these is a take-home activity kit related to the story covered that month at Messy Church. This kit contains activities suitable for a broad age range of children. While the contents vary from month to month, it generally includes a brief recounting of the Bible story covered, craft ideas, word searches, crossword puzzles, and coloring pages. Together with the activities and the craft created at Messy Church, the

take-home activity kit is meant to help families dialogue with children about the story, the biblical principle contained within it, and about God.

The second take-home resource is a sheet called ‘Talking to Your Kids about God.’ It is a theological reflection in easy-to-understand language centered on a single question that a child attending Messy Church has asked parents or grandparents. Families are invited to submit these questions whenever they arise so that they can be a focus of discussion and learning for all the families at Messy Church. Here are three such questions that were submitted at Christ Church: “Does God live on the clouds like the Care Bears?” “Spiderman has the power to make webs from his wrists. What are God’s powers and where do they come from?” and “How come God never spoke to me like he spoke to Samuel?”⁹ While this resource is not given out every month, an expanded use of it is planned for the future to focus on topics such as “Ideas for Praying with Your Children,” “Famous Kids of the Bible,” and “Nutshell Christianity: The Apostles’ Creed.”

The third take-home resource available to families is the lending library which contains books, children’s Bibles, music, and movies. While most of the items are geared to children, the lending library also contains resource books for parents and grandparents. One of these is Holman’s *Faith Begins at Home*, which focuses on nurturing faith within the family.¹⁰ Another resource is *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel, which talks about parenting principles and strategies based on blessings found in the Hebrew

⁹ Three questions brought to members of the Messy church leadership team by various parents from May 2008 to June 2010.

¹⁰ Holmen, *Faith Begins at Home*.

Scriptures.¹¹ Parents and children can sign out any of these resources each month, returning them the following month when they come to the next Messy Church gathering.

The fourth take-home resource is the parish monthly update for Christ Church. This contains information on ongoing opportunities for adult learning in the parish and what children are focusing on in the Sunday school program. This update also tells of special programs for adults such as The Alpha Course, The Marriage Course, and The Twelve Steps: A Spiritual Journey program. Additionally, it contains information on special programs for children such as the summer Vacation Bible School and the children's choir. Finally, the monthly parish update informs the reader about the broader work of the parish, giving information about ongoing and special outreach projects and opportunities for ministry. By putting this parish monthly update into the hands of Messy Church families, it is hoped that stronger ties between them and the broader parish will be forged.

The Leadership Team and Messy Church Ministry

The leadership team of Messy Church consists of members of Christ Church who have a passion for sharing the gospel and helping the parish connect with de-churched and non-churched families. As Moore has written, this passion and clarity of purpose among team members makes the crucial difference between Messy Church being real church and being just one more children's program.

If you think you are running a wholesome healthy-living club with a bit of singing thrown in, you will have a very different attitude to Messy Church from that of a group who believe they are building the body of Christ in their locality. The latter group will go through a lot more pain, soul-searching, hope, joy, awe, and wonder than the first. It will cost more and it will be more of an adventure. It will offend

¹¹ Wendy Mogel, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).

more people and it will attract less money from outside funding. It will arouse stronger feelings and provoke more questions than it answers. It will have a dynamism that will be hard to explain. It will matter more.¹²

Prior to serving as a team member at Messy Church, it is made sure that each person understands that Messy Church is not a vehicle to get people into Sunday church, nor is it a children's program or babysitting service. They also understand the role of parents and grandparents at Messy Church as the primary spiritual mentors of their children and grandchildren. As various members of Christ Church have volunteered to serve on the Messy Church team, it has been a priority to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the philosophy of ministry that is the foundation of Messy Church as well as the appropriate screening and police background check that is required by the Diocese.¹³

Each team member has a specific role, but all members help as needed. While a few members vary from month to month, the team is highly committed to Messy Church and, as a result, is very reliable. When Messy Church started in May 2008 the team consisted of two adults and two teens. By May 2011 it had grown to seven adults and five teens.

The most critical team member is the planning leader, a retired teacher with a passion for evangelism. This team member spends approximately fifteen hours a month planning for one hour of Messy Church. She regularly researches resources to purchase from stores or children's ministry catalogues and also scans the internet, which offers many free resources and ideas. Since Messy Church sessions work through the Bible on a three-year schedule, the planning coordinator chooses the key themes a year in advance

¹² Moore, *Messy Church 2*, 49.

¹³ Diocese of Toronto: Anglican Church of Canada, "Responsible Ministry: Screening in Faith," <http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/parish-administration/screening/> (accessed November 9, 2011).

and then pieces together the books, music, video, craft, and game supplies appropriate for each month's Bible story. As Messy Church approaches, she prepares all the materials to be used that month and begins to set up the rooms the night before the gathering. During the hour preceding Messy Church, she does the final set-up of the lending library, refreshment table, and craft supplies. Often one or two other team members will assist with set-up on the Friday night and Saturday morning before Messy Church.

The welcome leader greets families as they arrive and helps with sign-in and the registration of new families. She also makes sure everyone finds their name tag, or she makes one for them. Attendance is tracked closely at Messy Church, partly so that the team can accurately follow its growth. The key reason for attendance records, however, is security. As a ministry involving young children, it is important to have a record of who is present each month and which child attends with which adult(s). The welcome leader, assisted by her husband, makes sure families also pick up their take-home resources before they leave and helps with takedown following Messy Church.

The audio-visual technology leader oversees the operation of the compact-disc players, projection screen, DVD and VHS apparatus, and computer during Messy Church. This team member makes sure transitions, from singing songs to watching and listening to the story, flow as smoothly as possible from a technological viewpoint. As one of two men on the leadership team, he also makes a point of talking to the fathers and grandfathers who attend Messy Church to help provide a positive male role model and relational connection. With so many men absent in the lives of their children today, or present but simply uninvolved in their spiritual nurture, it is hoped that Messy Church will encourage

the fathers and grandfathers to be involved enthusiastically in their children's faith development.

The next role at Messy Church is that of storyteller and song leader. This role entails leading the opening prayer and welcome, introducing the key themes, leading the opening songs, and then telling the story. This team member also recaps the story during the closing large group gathering and leads the singing and saying of "The Grace" during this time. Finally, it is also the job of this person to make any announcements and to remind the families about the take-home resources and lending library. Although the planning coordinator does all the preparation of Messy Church stories, crafts, games, and songs, she and the storyteller meet regularly to do the long-range planning for each year's gatherings. This team member is also responsible for composing the take-home resource entitled "Talking to Your Kids About God."

The games and craft leaders explain the games and decide when it is time to move to the second game or the craft. If drama is used during the storytelling time, or as part of the games, these leaders dutifully don beards and bathrobes as needed. They also explain and demonstrate the crafts as well as offer the parents and grandparents extra instruction when necessary, so they can work well with their children on the craft of the day.

The Messy Church leadership team is completed by several teen helpers. These young people serve wherever needed as actors, pack horses, traffic control, set-up and takedown team, and general assistants in whatever happens at Messy Church. They help lead the games, pass out musical instruments, banners, and craft supplies, and join in the singing and story time. They interact with the families during the gathering, free play, and

help herd any lost sheep toward the designated activity of the moment. Perhaps most importantly, they serve as models to the younger children, who generally adore them.

Finally, while not actively serving at Messy Church itself, it is important to mention the role of another key part of the team: the parish of Christ Church. The parish offers free use of its building; covers the cost of lighting, heating, water, and paper supplies; and, generously supports Messy Church in its budget. Without this aid, the Messy Church monthly worship and learning experience simply could not happen. The parish's enthusiastic support demonstrates its own growth in mission over the past few years. It is beginning to accept that Sunday worship, although the norm for most regular members and dearly loved, is not the best means of reaching many de-churched and non-churched young families. As a key stakeholder, Christ Church is keen to see the effect that Messy Church has in the lives of these families. This study now will examine the concrete Messy Church research, beginning with the method and tools used in the qualitative analysis of Messy Church as it is experienced at Christ Church, Oshawa.

CHAPTER 6

THE EVALUATIVE METHOD

Like most organizations, when the Church evaluates programs, projects, and parishes it often conducts a quantitative analysis. A few of the numbers that hold interest for ecclesiastic bodies such as the Diocese of Toronto include Average Sunday Attendance, the number of Bible study groups, the number attending Sunday school, and the number of households on the parish list.¹ The Diocese also requests numbers related to financial matters: the average yearly donation, the number of paid staff, the amount of money given to outreach, and the number of contributors in a given year.² The figures resulting from this sort of quantitative analysis can yield information but only of a quantitative nature. Quantitative measures give little to no information about complex factors contributing to such figures. Examples of these complex factors include the social interactions taking place in the context or broad-based demographic changes. In addition, the accurate interpretation of such figures highly depends on the stability of the context in which they have been measured.

¹ Annual statistics that the Anglican Diocese of Toronto requires each incumbent to submit as information forming part of the *Incumbent's Annual Statistical Return*.

² Ibid.

Quantitative measures can be valuable indicators during periods of cultural or organizational stability. In such periods few variables change, so the numbers generated at one point in time can be interpreted more accurately and compared to those generated at another culturally or organizationally stable point in time. However, quantitative measures tend to be less reliable indicators during times of tumultuous change, when many variables are changing all at once and it is difficult to separate the effect of each variable on the overall quantitative measure.

For example, during a period in which church attendance patterns were stable, as they were in Christendom, a rise or fall in Average Sunday Attendance at Christ Church accurately reflected the number of people in the parish. However, in a time of cultural change, during which attendance patterns themselves are changing, quantitative measures can be deceiving. Christ Church may have grown substantially in the number of members, but if those people are coming only once a month instead of every week, a quantitative measure such as Average Sunday Attendance does not accurately reflect the number of people in the parish. In fact, Average Sunday Attendance figures may not have changed at all, even though the number of people in the church may have increased substantially.

Similarly, factors such as significant demographic shifts also can obscure interpretation of quantitative data. In a period of demographic stability, the number of members on Christ Church's parish list rightly may indicate growth or decline. However, in a period of serious demographic shifts due to such things as catastrophic epidemics or significant aging of the general population, this no longer will be true. In such periods, Christ Church may have many new members, but a coinciding increase in the number of

deaths can obscure evidence of this growth. As these examples show, numbers at best only can tell part of the story of a church.

Another reason why quantitative measures can give a less than rich picture of reality is that numbers do not address some of the most interesting questions. For example, they only can give the most rudimentary profile of people attending a church and can say little about why they are coming. In addition to this, numbers reveal next to nothing about more complex issues, such as what is happening in the lives of those people as a result of attending that church.

This is a realm of interest where qualitative research is most useful. Principally based on interviews and narrative data, qualitative analysis can provide a depth of information untapped by quantitative measures. Robert Weiss, in *Learning from Strangers*,³ argues that qualitative measures provide a rich depth of information; but, he acknowledges that they do entail some compromises not typical of quantitative measures. For example, Weiss says that interviews “sacrifice uniformity of questioning to achieve fuller development of information.”⁴ Interview-based studies also typically rely on a smaller sample size, which may reduce the broad application of research findings. Weiss points out, however, that they yield great gains “in the coherence, depth, and density of the material each respondent provides.”⁵

³ Robert Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Ibid.

Weiss explains that despite the drawbacks of small sample size and complex raw data, interviews have many benefits as a research tool. They develop detailed descriptions, allow integration of multiple perspectives, and describe processes. Furthermore, interviews develop holistic descriptions, give information about how events are interpreted by the participants, help bridge inter-subjectivities of the reader, identify variables, and frame hypotheses for quantitative research.⁶ Whereas quantitative research methods can answer questions with regard to frequency and personally valued amounts, qualitative measures best explore such basic questions as “Who? What? Where? When? Why?” Research that combines qualitative and quantitative measures ensures the fullest depth of data possible.

The present study has employed both qualitative and quantitative research tools to evaluate the worship and learning experience called Messy Church. The research examined who attends Messy Church and their reasons for doing so. It further explored how participation affected attenders’ beliefs, their sense of belonging, and their behavior as families. Data was collected primarily using qualitative tools, with quantitative measures providing additional information about demographics and attendance patterns.

Qualitative Research Tools

Two qualitative tools were used. The first was an interview with families who had attended Messy Church for a minimum of six months prior to the study.⁷ The second tool

⁶ Ibid, 9-11.

⁷ See Appendix for Messy Church Interview Questions.

was a written questionnaire,⁸ completed by each of these same families. The interviews were conducted, and questionnaires completed, over a period of four months. One to three interviews were conducted each week from the beginning of February 2011 to the end of May 2011. In order to maximize consistency in the interview process, one researcher conducted all the interviews.

Interview Process

The attendance records of Messy Church were used to select the families invited to participate in the study. Of the twenty-four families attending Messy Church by the time of the research period, there were eighteen families who had attended for at least six months. The criterion of a six-month period of participation was felt to be an appropriate minimum attendance, since this would allow families to have become acquainted with the format and setting of Messy Church and begin to meet other families. Any briefer period of participation was considered too short due to Messy Church only meeting once a month. While a longer period of participation may have been ideal for increased validity of the study's results, the growth in the number of families and the time frame for the interview period precluded a longer period of participation. While several participating families had attended since the beginning of Messy Church in the spring of 2008, others only had been attending since the early fall of 2010.

In order to inform the whole community of Messy Church about the planned interviews, a general announcement was made at the January 2011 gathering of Messy Church. The purpose of the interviews was explained as tri-fold: to receive feedback from

⁸ See Appendix for a sample of the questionnaire.

families on Messy Church, to get to know those families better, and to assess what effect Messy Church was having in their lives. It also was explained that they would receive a phone call to confirm whether or not they would agree to participate in the study.

When phone calls were made to each family to set up an interview date and time, once again the three reasons for conducting the interviews were explained. An interview schedule was created; and, a letter was mailed to families thanking them for their willingness to be interviewed and confirming the date, time, and venue of their interview. Of the eighteen families selected to be interviewed, seventeen successfully scheduled interviews within the time frame of the research period.

Interviews varied somewhat in length, lasting from one to two hours. The interviews were conducted at the home of the family or at the church building, whichever was most convenient for each family. Each interview was recorded using a Panasonic Digital Recorder, model RR-US591. This device records MP3 audio files which can be directly uploaded to a computer for ease of transcription. While interviews were conducted with all seventeen families, two of these were compressed into one interview since two related families wished to be interviewed together. Notes were taken during the interviews as a back-up measure, in case the audio recorder malfunctioned.

Description of the Interview

Interviews were conducted with each family as the basis for this study's qualitative analysis. Primary subjects of interest in these interviews included who the families were in terms of their age range, church affiliation and background, and family configuration. The

study also was interested in how these families found out about Messy Church and why they chose to attend. Finally, these interviews were interested in what had changed in the life of these families as a result of their participation in messy Church. The interview questions and format are described to give a thorough understanding of the process of qualitative analysis.

The interviews began with some casual conversation in order to set interviewees at ease and better engage them in the interview process. This entailed informal conversation about the weather; a positive comment on their home; or a question about their hobbies, work, or family history. This time also was used to remind them of the tri-fold purpose of the interviews: receiving their feedback on Messy Church, getting to know them better, and researching the effect that Messy Church was having on the families attending. This was when the audio recorder's use and purpose was explained, and they were asked for their permission to record the interview. All participating families agreed to be interviewed and recorded. The interviews were recorded in order to optimize accuracy of transcription, since a recording allows repeated listening to each interview. The interviews also were recorded so that a more informal, conversational format could be followed without the researcher having to stop the flow of conversation to take copious notes.

The interview format was based around thirteen questions, all listed on an interview guideline sheet. This sheet left sufficient space after each question for the interviewer to make notes on key points in the conversation. These questions helped to standardize the interviews and helped to keep them focused. This sheet also let the

families being interviewed know that there was a format to follow, even though the interview was conversational in style.

There was considerable flexibility in these interviews in that the conversation was allowed to veer from the topic of Messy Church from time to time. It was a conversation that allowed the interviewer to get to know each family better and vice versa. Much was learned about such things as family histories, their views on Christianity and the Church, parenting challenges and styles, and neighborhood connections. This flexibility made the interviews considerably longer than they might have been; but since part of the purpose was to strengthen relationship with these families, this was deemed appropriate.

Another factor that resulted in lengthy interviews was intentional encouragement on the part of the interviewer of detailed responses by the interviewees. Weiss, in his discussion of interview techniques, describes several ways in which interviewers can draw out more complex data from interviewees. Some of these include asking open-ended questions; requesting more detail; probing their reactions to questions; and asking them to make more explicit any non-verbal indications such as laughs, sighs, or quizzical expressions.⁹ The flexible structure of the interviews in the present study allowed for many of these techniques to be employed. The data was rich in quality. It was also substantial in quantity, as it yielded close to twenty-five hours of audio recordings. Each audio file was coded, with a number assigned to each family. No identifying information was included in the file itself, for reasons of privacy protection.

⁹ Weiss, *Learning From Strangers*, 75-76.

The Transcription and Encoding Process

This study was interested in conducting a qualitative analysis of Messy Church based primarily on interview data. Qualitative analysis of interview-based data is done by classifying the raw data according to themes of interest to the researcher. This involves a process of coding recorded transcripts according to the selected themes so that some analysis of the data is possible. The current study was interested in overarching questions about who attended Messy Church, why they attended, and what effect their participation was having on faith in the life of their family. These questions therefore shaped the themes of interest and the resultant codes used to analyze the recorded data.

Once recording was complete, a qualitative analysis of the interview content was conducted. The procedure for this was based on Philipp Mayring's General Content Analytic Process Model.¹⁰ The Mayring model for analyzing the content of research data proposes an eleven-step process. It begins with the definition of the research material. In the case of the present study, the research material was information gathered from families attending Messy Church for a minimum of six months.

The second step in Mayring's model is an analysis of the situation in which the data is provided, including the participants and venue. In the case of the present study, this encompassed the conversational interviews conducted with the families at their home or at the church building. Mayring's next step is the formal classification of the research material. In the present study, this was the primary data arising from the audio recordings and their subsequent transcriptions. Those parts of the audio recordings that did not relate

¹⁰ Philipp Mayring, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th ed., by Uwe Flick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 323-325.

in any way to Messy Church, or to the questions on the interview guideline, were eliminated from the transcriptions. The transcription of each audio file normally took between two to three hours. The average transcription was six typed pages in length. Transcriptions from all sixteen interviews yielded ninety-six pages of raw data.

The fourth step in Mayring's model requires that the direction of the analysis be defined. In the present research this referred to the primary research questions of who attends Messy Church, why they attend, and what occurs in their lives as a result of attending. These primary questions determined the development of further categories of study. For example, the question of who attends Messy Church gave rise to questions about present and past church connections and basic demographic categories, such as age range and the relational connections between the adults and children.

A fifth step in this model of content analysis is that of theoretical differentiation of the research questions. This entails linking the primary questions in a study to prior research on the same topic. Since the present study offers the first qualitative analysis of Messy Church, there was no other research to base a theoretical model on. However, since a primary area of interest was the faith development of de-churched and non-churched people, a model of conversion based on ancient Christian practices was used to define the research focus. To this end, the questions in the interviews and on the questionnaires were based on Alan Kreider's examination of conversion as involving change in belief, behavior, and belonging.¹¹

¹¹ Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, 103.

The sixth step in Mayring's model of content analysis is the definition of the analytic technique. In the present study, this entailed the technique of coding each statement made by family members during the interviews. This step was followed by the seventh: definition of the analytical units. In the case of Messy Church research, this entailed assigning primary codes to statements based on the research questions and demographic categories.

Mayring's eighth step involves further analytic categorization. This required examining the raw data contained in the interview transcripts for emerging themes. These themes were connected to the next step in the model, which is to re-assess the category system against the theoretical material. In the case of the present research this step resulted in the secondary codes being assigned to the data. For example, while one primary theme was "change in behavior," the secondary themes were change in "worship," "reading, knowing or applying Scripture," "talking to their children about God," "prayer," "fellowship with other Christians," or "helping those in need." It is important to note that while other secondary themes were possible, the secondary themes used in the data analysis were the ones that arose from the interview data itself. Primary themes and codes related to the primary research questions. Secondary themes and codes related to information that arose in the data.

The final steps in Mayring's model of content analysis are interpretation and application of content quality criteria. Due to the paucity of prior research on Messy Church, the present study will offer just a preliminary interpretation of the data and suggest avenues for future research. General content quality criteria were applied, particularly in

the form of consistency of interview protocols and transcription processes. Measures protecting the privacy of the participating subjects were respected in the study.

Primary and Secondary Coding Categories

The ninety-six pages of interview transcripts were analyzed by assigning a code to each statement in the interviews, based on the primary and secondary themes. Each set of primary and secondary themes related to one of the three key research questions. Tables 2, 3, and 4 outline the key research questions and indicate the primary and secondary themes used to code statements relating to those questions.

Table 2. Data Analysis Themes/Codes for Participants in Messy Church

Research Question	codes	Primary themes	codes	Secondary themes
Who is coming?	A1	Present church involvement	1	churched- regular
			2	churched- marginal
			3	de-churched
			4	non-churched
	A2	Past church involvement	1	Anglican
			2	Roman Catholic
			3	Other Protestant
			4	multiple
			5	none
	A3	Relationship	1	parent(s)
			2	grandparent
			3	child(ren)

The assignment of themes and codes to raw data is a crucial step in qualitative analysis, because it requires a detailed examination of each statement and prevents researchers from leaping too quickly to general interpretations of what is said in

interviews. The secondary themes in this study, which arose from this detailed analysis, allowed important details to emerge and gave the first hint of what the data contained. As an example relating to Table 2, a statement indicating a person had a past church involvement as a Roman Catholic would be coded “A2-2.”

Table 3 presents the primary and secondary themes and codes corresponding to the question of why families participate in Messy Church. Primary themes and codes relate to the questions of how families first heard about Messy Church and what the key attraction was for them first attending. Secondary themes and codes related to all the possible ways they could have heard and the variety of key attractors. As an example related to Table 3, a statement indicating that the hands-on learning environment of Messy Church was a key attraction for the family attending Messy Church was encoded as “B2-1.”

Table 3. Data Analysis Themes/Codes for Why Families Participate in Messy Church

Research Question	codes	Primary themes	codes	Secondary themes
Why are they coming?	B1	How they heard	1	Letter from Christ Church
			2	Announcement or bulletin at Christ Church
			3	Friend’s invitation
			4	Messy Church sign
			5	Newspaper advertisement
	B2	The key attraction	1	Hands-on activities
			2	Visual and auditory learning
			3	Part of something bigger
			4	Desire to learn more about Christianity

Table 4 presents the themes and codes applied to statements corresponding to the question of what is changing in the lives of families attending Messy Church. Primary themes and codes related to changes in behavior, belonging, and beliefs that families

reported in the interviews. Secondary themes and codes designated the variety of actual behaviors, sense of belonging, and beliefs that arose in the interview data itself. For example, a statement indicating that parents coming to Messy Church have started talking to their children more about God would be coded “C1-4.” Once the encoding of the interview transcripts was completed, analysis and interpretation of the interview data could begin.

Table 4. Data Analysis Themes/Codes for Changes Resulting from Messy Church Attendance

Research Question	codes	Primary themes	codes	Secondary themes
What is changing?	C1	Behavior	1	regular worship
			2	prayer
			3	reading Scripture
			4	talking about God
			5	Christian fellowship
			6	helping those in need
	C2	Belonging	1	Messy Church
			2	Christ Church
			3	other church
			4	Anglican Communion
			5	worldwide Christian faith
	C3	Belief	1	reality of God
			2	eternal life
			3	applicability of teachings
			4	strengthening of beliefs
			5	no change

The Messy Church Questionnaire

In addition to the interview transcripts, data arose from the written questionnaires. These questionnaires were mailed to each family in the study. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter confirming the date, time, and venue of the interview. Each

family was asked to complete the questionnaire prior to the interview date, so it could be collected at the time of the interview. The accompanying letter explained that the purpose of the questionnaire was to give families an idea of the focus of the interviews and to allow them time to consider the various questions. This also gave them an opportunity to offer a full written response on any issues important to them. Data arising from the questionnaires yielded demographic information on each family and also provided some measure of reliability for key questions included in the interview, by allowing the researcher to check for consistency of response across the interview and questionnaire.

The questionnaires began with basic questions of identification, age, and relationship to the children being brought to Messy Church. Six additional questions or statements, relating to the three primary research questions, then were listed. These included:

- (1) What made you first want to be a part of Messy Church?
- (2) What is happening for you and your family as a result of being a part of Messy Church?
- (3) I would describe the following Christian practices, talked about at Messy Church, as important in the life of my family.
- (4) How would you describe the church background of both you and your spouse, if they attend Messy Church?
- (5) Prior to coming to Messy Church how would you describe your relationship to the parish of Christ Church?
- (6) Is there anything else you'd like to comment on about Messy Church?

In the case of four of these six questions a number of possible responses were listed as a means of encouraging the parents and grandparents to consider several different options, in addition to what may first come to mind for them. Multiple responses were acceptable in each of these questions.

Data from the questionnaires only was encoded when it contained new information or a new depth of information to that already contained in the interview transcriptions. In this way, the information from the questionnaires was referred to as an additional source of richness when applicable. However, primarily it served as a tool to support the reliability of the interview data.

Quantitative Measures Used

The primary quantitative measure used in this study was the tracking of attendance. Overall attendance numbers were examined to assess the growth of Messy Church from its beginning in May 2008 to June 2011. The highs and lows in attendance according to month of the year were noted. Finally, sudden growth or decline in attendance across the three-year period of Messy Church was noted.

In addition to overall attendance, this study examined the attendance records of Messy Church to explore the regularity of attendance by each family participating in the study. This was done in order to assess how many of the seventeen families in the study could be considered regular (attending almost every month). Similarly, the number of families that would be considered sporadic in attending Messy Church (every third or fourth month) was noted. Together with the qualitative research tools, these quantitative measures yielded rich data regarding the missional connections being formed through Messy Church. A full description and interpretation of that data now will be examined.

CHAPTER 7

A PROFILE OF MESSY CHURCH FAMILIES

As a means of adapting to its current context, the parish of Christ Church started Messy Church in May 2008. It chose this particular adaptation in order to address two key challenges facing the parish: re-connecting with de-churched people and connecting with non-churched people. Three years after its launch, this study now offers a qualitative assessment of Messy Church. This chapter will profile who attends and their reasons for doing so. The analysis will examine basic demographics of the families attending and look at such parameters as age, gender, and family groupings. It will explore growth in attendance over the three-year period of Messy Church and the regularity of attendance among the study families. Church connections with both the broader Church and with the parish of Christ Church will be profiled. Finally, the chapter will examine how these families first heard about Messy Church and the aspects of this worship and learning experience that were most important in their decision to participate.

Demographics of the Families

In total, seventeen families participated in this study. The seventeen families in the study included twenty-three adults and thirty-seven children. In addition to the one

family who was selected but did not schedule an interview, there were six additional families attending Messy Church at the time of the study who were not included. This was because their attendance was considered too recent for them to be valid subjects.

In its examination of the age ranges of families attending, the study revealed that there are two groups of adults participating in Messy Church. The first of these is young parents in their mid to late thirties. The second group is grandparents in their mid-fifties to mid-sixties. Apart from the leadership team members, every adult coming to Messy Church falls into one of these two age categories. Of the twenty-three adults participating in this study, this breaks down statistically into 73 percent as young parents and 27 percent as grandparents. When Messy Church was started, it was not anticipated that a significant percentage of those attending would be grandparents. One of the primary goals of this worship and learning experience was to build relationships between the parish and young de-churched and non-churched parents and their children. The parish had not yet recognized that Messy Church also might be an important avenue of mission to grandparents and their grandchildren.

It was hoped that Messy Church would enable Christ Church to connect particularly with families whose children were in the age range of two to six years old. This age range received focus primarily because it was one with which the parish was not connecting well. For this reason, Messy Church initially offered activities in which the whole family could participate but with a targeted age range of two to six years for the crafts and games.

After two years, parents began asking for activities that could include their children who were now older than six years. In September 2010, Messy Church was

expanded to offer games and crafts geared to children aged seven to eleven. This change was accompanied by a significant growth in the number of older children attending.

While the largest number of children coming to Messy Church continued to be from the two-to-six age range, both younger and older children also attended. By the spring of 2011, when this study was conducted, 73 percent of the children attending were ages two to six years, 19 percent were ages seven to nine years, and 8 percent were under the age of two. The expansion of age range targeted for the games and crafts meant that entire families could participate better. The flexible nature of Messy Church also allowed parents to bring their babies and toddlers. These younger children could watch the other children, crawl about, play in the free-play area, and sleep or eat as needed.

In addition to examining age of children, an analysis of the gender of children attending Messy Church also was conducted. Of the thirty-seven children in this study of Messy Church, twenty were girls and seventeen were boys. In terms of percentages this means that 54 percent were females, and 46 percent were males. It is clear that the format of Messy Church ably attracts families with children of both genders.

In addition to age range and gender, the present study examined which adults in each family were predominantly responsible for bringing children to Messy Church. Among the seventeen participating families, there was a mixture. In 29 percent of the families it was a mother bringing children to Messy Church on her own. In 29 percent of the families a grandmother was bringing her grandchildren on her own. In 35 percent of the families attending, both the mother and father were bringing their children. In only one of the seventeen families participating in the study (6 percent) was a father bringing

the children by himself to Messy Church. While one grandfather occasionally did attend, he always came with either parent. For this reason, grandfathers were not listed as the primary adult bringing children to Messy Church. This data points to the key role that mothers and grandmothers are playing in the faith development of their children and grandchildren within the context of Oshawa. It also points to the desire in many families for both parents to be present.

Attendance at Messy Church

In addition to examining demographic information from the families attending Messy Church, this study was interested in the growth of this multigenerational worship and learning experience over the three years since its launch. Figure 1 charts this growth from May 2008 through June of 2011. Some patterns seen in this data include lower attendance during the months of January and February and strong attendance in September. Figure 1 also indicates the significant rise in attendance that occurred in September 2010, when the age range of activities at Messy Church was expanded to include children who were seven to eleven years old.

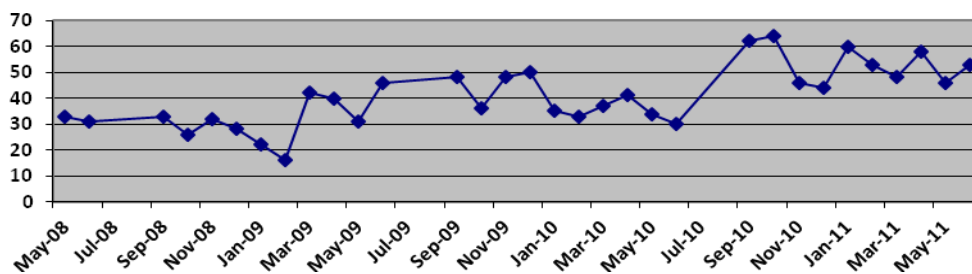


Figure 1. Attendance at Messy Church May 2008 – June 2011

An analysis of average attendance across the three years supports the finding that Messy Church has grown since its beginning. During the 2008-2009 school year, average monthly attendance was thirty-two adults and children. This increased to thirty-nine during the second year of Messy Church. By the third year, average monthly attendance had increased to fifty-three adults and children.

In addition to overall attendance, the present research explored the regularity of attendance among the families in the study. The attendance data revealed that of the seventeen families in the study, 76 percent were regular attenders and were present almost every month. Attendance records showed that the remaining 24 percent of families attending Messy Church were sporadic in their attendance, being present only every third or fourth month.

Prior Connections to the Broader Church

Beyond basic questions about attendance and the age, gender, and relationships of the people coming to Messy Church, this study also was interested in examining the connections that families had to the Church prior to attending. Initially the families' prior involvement to the Church, regardless of denomination, was examined. If they had no connection to the Church, other than attending weddings or funerals, they were classified as "non-churched." If they had attended regularly as children, or many years ago as adults but no longer attended (anything more than at Christmas or Easter), they were considered "de-churched." If they presently attended church, but only several times a year, they were deemed as "marginal attender." The final category in the analysis was "regular attender,"

which defined Messy Church participants who are involved in a church at least once a month.

Table 5 contains the results of the analysis of church involvement among the adults prior to their attendance at Messy Church. With the largest category of adults being classified as de-churched (39 percent) and with non-churched adults participating (9 percent), it is clear that Messy Church in fact is attended by the targeted groups of de-churched and non-churched people, although not exclusively so. A significant number of marginally attending families (26 percent) also attend Messy Church. This suggests that in addition to reaching some de-churched and non-churched people, a multigenerational form of worship such as Messy Church also may be effective in increasing connections with families attending Sunday church on a marginal basis.

Table 5. Church Involvement of Adults Prior to Messy Church

Church Attendance	AGE-RANGE OF ADULTS (NUMBER OF SUBJECTS)		
	All Adults (23)	Grandparents (6)	Parents (17)
Churched - regular	26%	50%	18%
Churched -marginal	26%	17%	29%
De-churched	39%	33%	41%
Non-churched	9%	0%	12%

As Table 5 further indicates, just over a quarter of the adults attending Messy Church became involved in a church on a regular basis. This represented six of the twenty-three adults in the study. It is significant, however, that of these six adults, three were grandmothers who always had been regular in attending church. When the adults in the study were examined according to the two subgroups of parents and grandparents, a more nuanced picture of Sunday church attendance emerged. The majority of the young parents

bringing their children to Messy Church fell into the ranks of the marginal attenders (29 percent), de-churched adults (41 percent), or non-churched adults (12 percent).

The data in Table 5 also supports the idea that church involvement has declined from one generation to the next. While the majority of grandparents were regular church attenders—there were no non-churched grandparents in the study—the largest sub-group of the young parents consisted of de-churched adults. The next largest category was marginal attenders, followed by that of regular attenders and then non-churched adults.

The church involvement of the subsequent generation, the children in the study, presented an even more secularized demographic. A full 68 percent of the children were non-churched prior to attending Messy Church, and another 16 percent were only attending marginally. Since a large percentage of the young parents were either marginal attenders, de-churched, or non-churched, it was not surprising that twenty-five of the thirty-seven children were deemed non-churched. It was clear from this data that the majority of the children in the study had no experience of church prior to attending Messy Church.

The above data makes apparent that churches interested in sharing the gospel with de-churched people need to focus on re-connecting with young adults with children. It is also clear from this data that churches who hope to share the gospel with the non-churched will want to make reaching children a high priority, in order to be able to present the gospel to both them and their parents. As the final vestiges of Christendom pass away, the ranks of the de-churched likely will decline and the ranks of the non-

churched can be expected to continue to grow significantly. As the culture becomes more secularized, children will have less and less opportunity to hear the Christian story.

As the results of this study demonstrate, reaching children with the gospel message is as important as ever. However, churches need to consider carefully the best way to do this. Many of the children who attended the Sunday schools of the 1950s and 1960s are now largely absent from church.¹ This suggests that separating children from their parents in order to attend Sunday school, while parents sit in church, may not be the best way to nurture faith in children. The results of this study suggest that churches need to consider ways to engage the entire family.

In addition to being interested in the overall church involvement of the families in this study, the past or present denominational connections of the adults attending Messy church were examined. Based on the information these families provided on the questionnaires and in the interviews, they were divided into various denominations or listed as having no denominational connection. Table 6 presents the results of this examination.

Table 6. Past Denominational Connections of Adults

Denominational Connection	Percentage of Adults Attending Messy Church
Anglican	39%
Roman Catholic	26%
Baptist	9%
Pentecostal	9%
Seventh Day Adventist	9%
none	12%

¹ Please see Chapter 2 of this paper for further details.

The data revealed a wide diversity among the adults participating in the study. Adults with some past or present Anglican connection made up the largest group (39 percent), followed by Other Protestant (27 percent). This group was divided further into the subgroups of Baptist, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventist, as these groups became evident from the raw data. The diverse denominational background of adults attending Messy Church affirms that denominational boundaries and loyalties are declining in today's post-Christendom context. Inter-marriage across denominations is one sign of this. It surfaced that 50 percent of the adults with Roman Catholic connections in this study are married to a spouse with Anglican connections.

In addition to inter-marriage indicating the breakdown of denominational loyalty, the results of this study suggest that there now exists an openness to attend worship in an Anglican setting despite non-Anglican connections. For example, two grandmothers with Seventh-day Adventist connections mentioned in the interviews that they were happy to bring their grandchildren to Messy Church. They were especially open to this because it was offered on a Saturday, which is the normal day of worship in that denomination. Likewise, adults in this study with everything from prior Baptist to present Pentecostal connections had no hesitancy in bringing their children or grandchildren into an Anglican setting. The key factors drawing them to Messy Church had little to do with denomination.

Prior Connections to the Parish of Christ Church

In examining the connection of Messy Church families to the Church, the present study explored what their connection to the parish of Christ Church had been prior to

attending Messy Church. For example, the study researched if any participating adults had attended Sunday school at Christ Church but now were de-churched, attending only at Christmas or Easter. The number of adults attending Christ Church marginally (several times a year) as opposed to regularly (at least once a month) also was examined.

Of the twenty-three adults in the study, 61 percent had no connection to the parish of Christ Church prior to attending Messy Church. Of the twenty-three adults, 9 percent had come to Sunday school in the parish but had virtually no connection since moving from their parents' home, and 26 percent attended the parish marginally. Only one adult of the twenty-three (4 percent) was already a regular attender at Christ Church prior to attending Messy Church. This data suggests that many of the adults attending Messy Church are not doing so because they are already active and committed members of the parish. The interviews revealed that their reasons for coming to Messy Church involved many different factors.

Why Families Attend and Participate in Messy Church

The question of why families attend Messy Church is two-fold. It involves both how they first heard about Messy Church and what factors attracted them to participate. In terms of how they first heard about Messy Church, 29 percent of the families in the study reported that this happened through a friend's invitation. This was the largest grouping and indicates that personal invitation is still an effective means of encouraging attendance.

The next most common way of hearing, at 23 percent, was the initial letter of information to families that recently had children baptized at Christ Church. Since the

parish already had a sense that it was failing to connect with these young parents and their children through Sunday church, an informative letter of invitation was seen as a viable means of letting such families know about Messy Church. Several of the earliest and most regular participants at Messy Church came as a result of this letter.

Following this category, 18 percent heard about Messy Church through a verbal or printed announcement at Christ Church. The parish deliberately made such announcements at the Easter services preceding the beginning of Messy Church, so that as many marginal and de-churched people could hear about it as possible. The annual Easter mailing, sent to every home on the parish list, also included information about Messy Church.

The fourth most important means of hearing about the beginning of this new form of worship and learning for families was the Messy Church sign with its brightly colored rubber boots that have become the unofficial Messy Church logo. A total of 12 percent of families were first made aware by this means. Table 7 shows the full breadth of ways in which families first heard about Messy Church.

Table 7. The Ways in Which Families First Heard About Messy Church

How Families Heard	Percentage of Families
Friend's invitation	29%
Letter to baptismal families	23%
Christ Church announcement	18%
Messy Church sign	12%
Newspaper advertisement	6%
Christ Church website	6%
Diocesan information	6%

As Table 7 indicates, despite the highly technological era, personal invitations are still an effective way for people to hear about something new. One couple who attended Christ

Church once or twice a year following the birth of their children first was informed about Messy Church through the letter to families who had children baptized in the two years prior to the start of Messy Church. Although rarely attending Sunday church, they were eager to bring their children to Messy Church. After attending the inaugural session of Messy Church they invited a non-churched couple from their neighborhood to bring their children, too. These two couples have been among the most regular attenders at Messy Church.

A grandmother, whose adult daughter is severely physically handicapped, was bringing one of her granddaughters to Messy Church. She told her other daughter about Messy Church. This young woman then started bringing her own two daughters regularly, allowing these three cousins to enjoy Messy Church together. In another case, a family who read about Messy Church on the church website invited the husband's sister to attend with her children. Although working many weekends, this young woman finds it easier to bring her children to Messy Church rather than to bring them to Sunday service in the church that she attends marginally.

The results of this study indicate that although personal invitation seems to be most effective, there are many avenues by which people hear about something like a new form of church. Personal letters, signs, newspaper advertisements, websites, and verbal announcements all can be helpful. Data from this study shows that churches wanting to develop their own Fresh Expression of church should explore many avenues for informing people. Beginning in October 2011 Christ Church will try another avenue: publicizing Messy Church in a secular publication sent home with school children across the Durham region.

Aspects of Messy Church that Drew Families to Participate

Besides studying how families first heard about Messy Church, the study also examined the question of attraction. Key factors that initially drew families to attend were explored. However, before the families discussed the positive aspects of Messy Church that drew them to participate, many of these families described why attending Sunday church was a negative experience for them. Overall, 88 percent of the young families were attracted to Messy Church because they wanted a viable alternative to Sunday church.

Parents made a number of specific comments on the issue of why Sunday church was a negative experience for them. The following interview excerpts contain some of these and are included here to illustrate the challenges of Sunday church for at least some young families with children. For example, one marginally attending mother said,

I do enjoy going to church, but going to church at the age the kids are. . . . I don't enjoy it, because I don't even hear anything. I'm just sitting there because I'm constantly having to keep them occupied. . . . For me Messy Church is an entrance way for them to get their life into Christianity. . . . 'cause honestly I don't know. . . . What I was getting from them about church was they didn't want to go. They didn't get anything out of it. I don't know. It's quite possible we would have given up. . . . We were talking about going individually . . . which is fine for us . . . but we get so little time with the kids!

This mother felt that neither she nor her children, who were too young for the Sunday school program offered, were benefitting from Sunday church. It was a negative experience for her, because she was kept busy attending to their needs rather than participating in the worship. It was a negative experience for her children because she continually had to discipline them in order to keep them quiet so they would not distract fellow Sunday worshippers. Additionally, she did not feel that it was a viable option for

her or her husband to attend church individually because they already had so little time together as a family on weekends. It is important to note that while a staffed church nursery was available on Sundays, this was not a choice this family desired to make because they already left their children in daycare throughout the week.

This first family's comment was echoed in that of a second family, whose church did not offer any separate program for children but expected them to sit with their parents in church. Although this family was considered regular in their church attendance, because they did take their children to Sunday church at least once a month, they were clearly frustrated with the experience:

[regular attender, mom] When I have to spend most of my time disciplining, instead of being able to enjoy or getting anything out of the service . . . it becomes very frustrating for me. . . . And the kids weren't learning. . . .
[dad] well, they didn't want to go to church . . . church was like
[mom] . . . pulling teeth
[dad] I could not envision going forward . . . and fighting every Sunday to get the kids to go to church.
[mom] I would walk out completely frustrated because I just sat there for an hour getting nothing out of it because I was like "Sh . . . sh . . . sh . . . don't do that, don't do that" and I'm like. . . . The point of this was?

The above family comment highlights this mother's frustration at how little she was able to benefit from the service because she was preoccupied with disciplining her children. This comment also echoes the prior excerpt's reference to Sunday church becoming a negative experience for not only the parents but also for the children. The expectation underlying the above comments seems to be that Sunday church is a time when children should be seen but not heard. The frustration with trying to train children to be quiet in church is echoed further in this third family's comment. The marginally attending mother

shared this: “It’s hard for them to stay quiet [in Sunday church]. . . . They get to a certain age and they’re really loud and active and sometimes you feel bad. . . . You don’t want to disturb anybody else’s experience, or have them disrupting things.”

Another family focused their comments on the negative experience of trying to keep children quiet, specifically on what they saw as an Anglican tradition of quiet worship. One de-churched mom explained:

Especially if you grew up Anglican . . . you know what I mean? . . . you could hear a pin drop in church on Sundays . . . if my grandmother saw us chew gum we were dead. [She laughs] I still remember getting the stare one day . . . and I know church has changed a lot . . . but when you’re raised that way in the church . . . when it’s your kids making the noise, you just want to die . . . and a two year old. . . . I don’t expect her to go and sit still.

The above comments all point to the negative experience of trying to keep children quiet so they do not disturb other people during worship, which seems to lead to the idea that this makes church a negative experience for both the children and the parents.

The above comments were made by parents who were either still regular attenders or had some experience of Sunday church as children and were now marginal attenders or de-churched people. Given the negativity expressed by these parents, this study was interested to know how non-churched parents felt about Sunday church. Even though they had very limited experience, their comments too were negative for several reasons.

The below comments, taken from an interview with a non-churched couple who bring their children to Messy Church, reveal that Sunday church not only can be daunting for the non-churched due to the formality of Anglican worship, it can upset them because they may not understand basic Christian teachings that are assumed by the liturgy. For

example, these non-churched young parents made a comment related to the saying of the Confession, which they experienced on the one Sunday this couple had attended Sunday church with friends.

[non-churched mom] There was a lot of . . . um, obey or else. . . . You're a sinner It was upstairs on the slide [the Confession is projected, as is all liturgy on Sunday].

[dad] yeah, that pushed me away

[mom] so then it was a struggle to say. . . . Should we go?

[dad] that's what happens for me . . . I try to be a very open-minded person . . . but if I am pushed in a certain direction . . . I won't take it

[mom] I can say what's very interesting is that at the start [of Messy Church] I don't think he [husband] wanted to be much involved . . . and now he comes every month

[dad] this light-hearted format . . . it works for the kids and it works for me. . . . Maybe there are other adults who are not super comfortable with the format that happens upstairs [at Sunday church].

The above comment was alarming because at Christ Church every effort is made to focus intentionally on God's grace, yet this couple heard condemnation and perhaps even coercion in the words of the Confession. The non-churched clearly view things such as a prayer of confession through a very different lens than Christians do. This excerpt emphasized that by its very nature Sunday liturgy often is geared to people already familiar and in accordance with basic Christian practices, like a shared prayer of confession or even the concept that people need to confess. As all of the above parents' excerpts show, Sunday church does not work for many people.

Data from the interviews revealed clearly that negative experiences of Sunday church were partly responsible for families being attracted to an alternative form of worship and learning. The data also revealed positive factors that attracted these families to come to Messy Church. Based on both the interview and questionnaire data four key

themes emerged. The most common reason that families gave for coming to Messy Church was that they wanted their children to learn about the Bible in an enjoyable age-appropriate setting in which parents and grandparents could be involved. All but one of the seventeen families in the study mentioned this as a key reason for coming.

Excerpts from two families' interviews are listed below. These excerpts indicate that some young families want to interact with their children in a worship and learning experience rather than being separated from them during worship. These comments suggest that it is the multigenerational and interactional format of Messy Church that serves as key attractor for these families:

[marginal attender dad] But now having kids . . . I want them to be introduced to God the way I was as a kid . . . I like the format
[mom] yeah, it works really, really well . . . I know there was one month I missed due to the kids being sick
[dad] and the crazy activities . . . the running round
[mom] even what we did at Messy Church last year, with Moses in the basket . . . and running through the reeds and stuff. . . . [Her son] knows that story now . . . because the activities drilled it into his head.

The comments of this mother and father indicate their pleasure in interacting with their children as they learn Bible stories in an interactive format. A comment by another mother shows that, despite no longer attending Sunday church herself, she has a desire to teach her children about God, and Messy Church is a vehicle that she feels helps her to do this. This de-churched mother said, "I guess it makes me feel good that I'm giving them that opportunity . . . to have faith and to learn about God . . . it's a positive thing. I'm giving that experience to them . . . what they do with it will be up to them." These parents, although marginal and de-churched in their connection with Sunday church,

expressed an interest in instilling faith in their children. These comments show that Messy Church is giving them that opportunity.

Churched grandmothers who bring their non-churched grandchildren to Messy Church seem especially keen to fill a spiritual and biblical gap that they see as missing. The excerpts from interviews with two different grandmothers indicate the predicament of Christian grandparents whose own children are not attending a church. One regularly attending grandmother responded, “My grandkids don’t . . . I mean they don’t really go to church at all . . . and I’d like my grandkids to know the stories of Scripture. My daughter used to go to church but she doesn’t anymore. But I still want my grandkids to know about God.” In the case of this grandmother, Messy Church is viewed as a vehicle for her to teach her non-churched grandchildren about the Bible. The multigenerational worship and learning was a key attractor. This was echoed in the interview excerpts from another regularly attending grandmother who shared the following:

The newspaper ad listed games, Bible stories . . . and for all ages . . . and I thought of my daughter’s children . . . my grandchildren. . . . ‘Cause they don’t go to church and she’s sort of estranged from church right now . . . but you know I thought. . . it [Messy Church] is nothing to do with my church . . . and so . . . and you know she agreed. . . . and they love it. The week before it’s always like. . . . “Next week is Messy Church, right Grandma?”

Interestingly, even non-churched parents, who by their own description are not ready to commit to Christianity, can want their children to know about its basic teachings.

This is revealed in the following comment of one non-churched mom:

We’re trying to enlighten our children. . . . and I think it’s honest to say that because of both of our history we don’t have a very strong faith in us . . . ‘cause it was never really instilled in us. . . . but we want to give our children the

knowledge . . . and let them make some choices, and raise their awareness. . . . I didn't have that, and I'd like to give that to them.

This mother's comment highlights that she and her husband are attracted to Messy Church because they see it as a vehicle that helps them, despite their own lack of exposure to Christianity, to equip their children to be able to make choices about faith. In the present context of an increasingly secular society, such families may present a new opportunity for churches to share the gospel.

Next to teaching their children about Christianity, the second most prevalent reason given for coming to Messy Church was the hands-on activities involved in learning. The passive listening often associated with Sunday church and even Sunday school was mentioned by several families as a negative feature of Sunday church. Overall, 88 percent of the families mentioned that the games and crafts were very important to them.

The comments of several families highlight the common theme of interactive learning that emerged in their interview transcripts. About her granddaughter, one de-churched grandmother said, "The things she likes are the crafts. . . . I know she loves the crafts . . . especially if there's glue and paint. . . . she talks about it and gets excited. . . . she looks forward to Messy Church." For this grandmother the hands-on learning involved in a craft activity was important. For another family it was both the crafts and music that were effective in teaching the Bible story of the day. The de-churched mother explained, "I know they like the music . . . I've caught my kids a few times singing the songs. The crafts are nice . . . I know there's a message in them . . . and we can talk about that at supper time." A third family also mentioned the games and crafts as important.

The regularly attending grandmother said, “Everything is built on the story . . . the games, the crafts . . . when they took the kids through the Red Sea . . . I thought that was amazing.” For a fourth, marginally attending family it was the totality of the interactive learning experience that they felt was key. The mother described the experience, which seemed to suit the distinct personalities of her children equally well: “What really works well with our kids is that . . . they’re involved . . . it’s not passive.” She explained that while her son “can do passive,” her daughter “has to be actively involved.”

The third most common reason given by families for why they come to Messy Church is that they want their children to experience being part of something larger than just their family, especially when it comes to faith. Overall, 71 percent of the families mentioned this in their interviews and questionnaires. Three interview excerpts in particular highlight this.

[de-churched mom] We can tell them things here at home, but it’s good for them to see that there is a whole community that shares beliefs as well
[dad] yeah, it’s a way to get them learning about it. . . . And they’re not always overly cooperative to get ready on Sunday morning for church-church.

Once again, these parents contrasted the negative experience of Sunday church with that of Messy Church. They wanted their children to experience being part of a faith community, but not at any cost. They specifically wanted them to have a positive experience of being part of a faith community.

This desire to expose children to a faith community also was echoed in comments by two grandmothers bringing their non-churched or marginally attending grandchildren to Messy Church. The first (de-churched) grandmother highlights that the experience is an

encouragement to her, as she meets other families interested in instilling faith in their children, and says, “It’s an encouragement. . . . just being with other children and other parents . . . even though there’s not much socializing going on . . . just being in a church environment . . . where I see other people interested in the same thing . . . that’s encouraging. . . . that I’m not alone in wanting my grandchild to know.” The second grandmother highlights the opportunity for her to interact with her grandchildren in a church setting. As a marginal attender, she makes this comment:

Benefits for myself? . . . I think just being a part of the kids’ . . . you know . . . going with the kids and being a part of something like that . . . that’s meaningful to me . . . and them being a part of it . . . there are some days I think [laughs] . . . some Saturdays I think, now why am I going here, these kids have parents [laughs] . . . but I do.

The fourth theme that emerged, when families were talking about why they come to Messy Church, was that both visual and auditory forms of learning are involved. This was mentioned by 30 percent of the families. Two of their comments, taken from the interview transcripts, illustrate the importance of multi-sensory learning. They are included here to give a sense of why this was important to parents. Overall, they may point to desired shifts in educational practices, with shared emphasis on auditory and visual learning.

The first mother (de-churched) points to the holistic learning that occurs in multi-sensory worship. She shared, “I think they’re absorbing it [the Bible story] a million times better than if they were just sitting listening in a Sunday school. . . . They’re living it, breathing it, playing it.” The second mother, who is a high school teacher, describes the multi-sensory experience involving games, crafts, and music as a “multiple intelligence” approach. She is a regular attender and offers the following:

Because I'm at Messy Church too . . . I'm seeing exactly how they've seen it. . . . Like the last month we were talking about the walls of Jericho . . . and then later they heard the word Jericho and they said, 'That's just like at Messy Church!' they got really excited and stuff . . . it really sinks in, because I know what they've learned . . . plus you're using all the multiple intelligence . . . it's brilliant . . . like the visual and auditory and hands on.

In summary, the research data showed that there are primarily two groups of adults bringing children to Messy Church: de-churched and marginally attending young parents plus regularly attending or de-churched grandmothers. While there were a number of ways these families first heard about Messy Church, the largest number had heard through personal invitation. The reasons they were coming had to do both with negative experiences at Sunday church and several positive attractions of Messy Church. The two most important of these were the learning of the Bible in a multigenerational setting and the participatory and interactive nature of Messy Church. Perhaps in a post-literate culture in which learning is often multi-sensory, Messy Church especially can address people's spiritual yearning to teach their children about God and to worship in a truly multigenerational setting. While the study showed that Sunday church often does not address the needs of young families very well, Messy Church seems well designed for this. The study now turns from the analysis of who attends Messy Church and their reasons for doing so, to examine what is happening in the lives of these families as a result of their participation.

CHAPTER 8

GROWING MISSIONAL CONNECTIONS

The story of the Bible reveals God's mission in the world. It is a mission which will result in the perfect reign of His Kingdom and the complete defeat of evil. The story of the Bible also reveals that the fulfillment of God's mission already has begun in Jesus Christ. As Lesslie Newbigin has said, the Christian world mission has its entire foundation in this mission of God and is comprised of both a proclaiming and a propelling role.¹ The Church, by its words and deeds, is to proclaim the good news of God in Christ and to live this new reality into being. Each church only can do these two things by connecting with its particular context, which is part of the world God loves.

In an increasingly secular society, connecting with people in order to share the gospel with them will be more and more important. Such relationships constitute missional connections. This chapter offers a qualitative analysis of the missional connections made through Messy Church. It already has been shown that de-churched and non-churched people, together with marginal church attenders, are participating in this

¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 128-129.

new form of worship and learning. This study now will examine how their participation in Messy Church is developing them as disciples of Jesus.

Growing Disciples

To examine if Messy Church is growing disciples of Jesus, this study explored what has changed in the life of the families attending. The elements of change that were explored were based on an ancient model of conversion described by Kreider. This model of conversion includes changes in behavior, belonging, and belief.² Kreider argues that behavioral changes were assumed as a sign of authentic conversion (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:1; Ephesians 4:25-32). Conversion also involved a new sense of belonging, as converts began to be incorporated into the Christian community (cf. Ephesians 2:11-22). Beliefs began to change as a result of rigorous catechesis (cf. Hebrews 5:12-6:2; Romans 12:2).

Applied to the present-day context of Messy Church, this model of conversion seeks evidence in the participating families of three things. The first is evidence of basic Christian behaviors. The second is increasing participation in, and belonging to, the Christian community. The third is increasing knowledge and acceptance of Christian beliefs. To this end, the interviews and questionnaires conducted with the families in this study examined changes in behavior, belonging, and belief.

Changes in Behavior

While there are many behaviors that could be associated with Christian conversion, five key behaviors were mentioned in the interview and questionnaire data of

² Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, xv.

families participating in Messy Church. These included worshiping God, praying, knowing Scripture, talking with children about God, having fellowship with other Christians, and helping people in need. The interview and questionnaires probed if families experienced change in any of these behaviors and if they attributed such changes to their involvement with Messy Church. Table 8 presents the percentage of families that reported such changes.

Table 8. Behavioral Changes Reported Among Attending Families

Increased Behavior	Percentage of Families
Corporate Worship	82%
Prayer	47%
Knowledge of Scripture	100%
Talking about God with Children	100%
Christian Fellowship	35%
Helping People in Need	59%

A key reason families gave for coming to Messy Church was their desire for their children and grandchildren to know the stories of the Bible and primary Christian teachings. As Table 8 reveals, the parents and grandparents in the study felt this goal was being realized. Interview transcripts from every family contained comments about how being involved in Messy Church was increasing the knowledge of Bible stories in their children, and in several cases it was increasing the biblical knowledge of parents as well.

Four excerpts from the interview transcripts of different families particularly reflect this. One marginally attending mother's comment indicates that not only was her son learning the stories told at Messy Church but also that these were a topic of conversation afterwards. She said,

We were just talking about this . . . last night when I was filling out the questionnaire. I did it with them at the table. . . . and everything that he [her son] knew. . . . I could name names that came up in the Bible stories that we were doing and he could name . . . well, not every one. . . . But he knew every single story. . . . It was amazing. It was like. . . . Wow, he's really remembering this.

A second mother highlighted that not only was her child learning the Bible stories, but she too was re-learning them due to their participation at Messy Church. This marginally attending mother commented:

And you know even just review of the stories for my own self. . . . Because where I learned them it was through Sunday school and after that through church. . . . It's more with the sermons it's applying it to your daily life, but it's not actually reviewing it like you would at Messy Church. So even with me, it's refreshing my memory about a lot of things that I learned.

This comment about the stories being a good review for parents and an introduction for the children also was echoed by a de-churched grandmother. She had much to say on the matter:

Well, I think for me it's a lot of refresher. . . . refreshing my memory of the stories . . . and . . . she [her granddaughter] doesn't know anything about Bible stories. . . . It's all new to her. I'm quite sure she's retaining it . . . 'cause for instance regarding the Ten Commandments. . . . Four year olds can tell lies . . . and so we talk about that . . . God doesn't want us to tell lies. . . . So we've incorporated the Ten Commandments when we've been talking . . . so the lessons we learn we can incorporate into our daily life and it's not just me. . . . Like if I wasn't taking her to Messy Church. . . . It's not just me and my ideas. . . . It's what other people are learning too, and it's in the Bible.

Finally, a second grandmother highlighted that the learning of Bible stories was transferring into broader spiritual growth in her granddaughter. While initially just coming to Messy Church, this de-churched grandmother now has started bringing her granddaughter regularly to Sunday church, where she now attends Sunday school and part of the worship service:

Yes, there's a big change [in their knowledge of the stories]. . . . The kids knew nothing before. . . . And what little I knew it's expanded that. . . . they're growing spiritually as well as socially. . . the way they talk . . . I said "When we go up and

have the bread and wine, do you know what that's about?" And she's [grand-daughter] like "O yeah. Jesus' body and his blood." And I was like "Okay." I didn't know what to say to her after that. . . . I didn't know she'd know . . . but she does and she understands that. . . . She really enjoys it here and she loves the stories.

The above comments collectively suggest that the Messy Church format of telling the Bible story via various media followed by reinforcement of the story through songs, games, crafts, and take-home activities are helping these families know key Bible stories. For many of the marginally churched and de-churched parents and grandparents, this reminds them of stories they once knew. For the predominantly non-churched children and grandchildren, this provides their first introduction to the great stories of the faith.

Another change in behavior reported by all the families in this study was that of talking to their children more about God since attending Messy Church. Since families are experiencing it together, and then taking home activities and books that they study together, more opportunities arise for them to talk about Bible stories and their meaning. Three specific excerpts from interview transcripts give examples of how attending Messy Church has resulted in families talking more about faith. The first comes from a marginally churched mother. She offers this feedback regarding Messy Church:

Just to see them learning. . . . I mean when we know what they've talked about . . . we usually have lunch after [Messy Church], and we go over it again with them. You know . . . "What did you learn?" . . . To see what sunk in. You know at lunch time, us talking about it with them kind of brings the point home again. Sometimes when it's so busy at Messy Church they're not necessarily getting the whole idea of it. And the activity sheets are good . . . [her son] did all of them this week. Yeah, he was pretty excited about them.

This first comment highlights the parents' initiation in this process, following up on the story focused on at Messy Church. A second, de-churched mother also comments on how

the children being at Messy Church with both her and her own mother enables conversations with her children about faith. She said, “We just really like it . . . Mom likes taking the kids too . . . we like having the kids there. . . . I just love that they’re learning through play and that the church is a fun building . . . the base is there . . . so it makes it easy for us to talk with them.”

The second comment was made by a mother who was baptized as an infant and then never taken to church again. As a completely non-churched person she recognizes that Messy Church now enables her to have conversations with her children that would not occur otherwise. She explains the following:

I would say we are talking more with them about God now . . . the first part is the children have questions now . . . so had we not started coming to Messy Church. . . . and had their knowledge base not been increased. . . . their minds would not be stimulated and they wouldn’t be asking the questions. . . . So because we’re coming, it does evoke more thought and more questions from them, which we then have discussion on that. . . . And there are times, less with [her husband] but more with me where we will engage in a conversation . . . depending on the situation What they’ve seen or what is outside and then we’ll talk about it. . . . Like maybe their grandmother who passed away. . . . Like we believe she’s up in heaven with God. . . . And they’re like, “What does he look like?” . . . and I attribute that all to the fact that we come here.

The above comments indicate that by participating in Messy Church these families are sharing an experience that in turn gives them a focus for discussion about God and about faith. Sometimes it is assumed that Christian belief precedes Christian behavior; yet, in the case of these families the interview data suggests that Christian behaviors such as participating in worship together can lead to parents talking with children more about faith, which in turn can lead to deeper belief.

A third change in behavior reported by families was increased attendance at worship. An abundant 82 percent of the families mentioned that by participating in Messy Church they were worshipping God more. Several excerpts from the interview transcripts of different families highlight this common theme. One marginally attending mother said, “Yeah, Messy Church does obviously make us come once a month. And we know that the kids enjoy it and it’s easier to be there with them.” Her statement indicates that since Messy Church is enjoyable for the children, and therefore presumably more so for the adults, they attend it regularly. Even though it is only offered once a month, this means that such families are worshipping more often together.

A second mother, whose husband’s shift work affects their ability to attend Sunday church as a family, sees Messy Church as an opportunity for at least her and her daughter to attend a form of church together. Although moved to another city, she continues to attend Messy Church almost every month. As a marginal attender, she makes this observation:

Our schedule is pretty busy and [her husband] works odd hours, so going to church as a family on a regular basis is pretty difficult. He works with . . . [local transit company] so they are a 24/7 operation. . . . Their shift changes pretty much every six weeks, but they’re. . . . For him to get weekends off is like pretty difficult . . . so I find that Messy Church is really convenient, and it’s a good way to have that time at church with [her daughter].

This next comment indicates that Messy Church is not viewed as simply a children’s program that parents also attend. In the case of this de-churched mother, for her it is simply a different form of worship. During her interview, she said, “I consider Messy Church as us going to church. . . . I consider that as a family church. Even for the

adults it's fun. . . . And we're like talking to other parents . . . and there's more interaction than there would be on a normal Sunday." This understanding of Messy Church as authentic worship also was echoed by another mother, who is non-churched. She replied with enthusiasm, "Absolutely we are worshipping more. . . . especially with the struggle my husband and I have with 'how much and what elements'. . . . Prior to coming here we were more opposing forces . . . I don't know that we would have introduced it [teaching about faith] . . . so this has made a huge difference." Here it seems Messy Church also provides a safe venue to explore faith as a family.

Finally, a comment from a fifth excerpt further supports the idea that by offering a form of worship that is enjoyable for a variety of ages, Messy Church is encouraging families to be more regular in their attendance at worship. A de-churched mother offered this affirming feedback:

Yes, we are worshipping more. . . . Absolutely. . . . And a big part of that is . . . we try to come on Sundays, but if it doesn't work out . . . and then. . . . It just wouldn't be happening . . . whereas this [Messianic Church]. . . . it's once a month, and they know that we're going. . . . and so it's never an issue because they look forward to it and they're excited to go.

Her statement and the preceding others indicate two things. First, these families view Messy Church as not simply a program for their children but as a worship experience for the whole family. Even the non-churched family recognized Messy Church as such. Despite the fact that the songs, games, and crafts clearly are geared to children, parents identified the experience as worship. Second, these comments point to an understanding of regular worship as something that can happen just once a month. This view seems to parallel that of Sunday church attenders, whose frequency of attendance at worship seems

to be decreasing with increased demands on Sundays for such things as employment, child-custody arrangements, and organized sport schedules.

The next change in behavior that families reported as a result of coming to Messy Church was increased service to people in need. Although no families referred to this in their interviews, 59 percent referred to this on the written questionnaires. It is possible that this discrepancy between the interview and the questionnaire results reflected hesitancy among the families to talk about things like charitable giving. It could be that their answers on the questionnaire were elicited as a result of feeling they ought to respond positively to this suggested possible change. It also could reflect the fact that the open-ended nature of the questions in the interview simply did not elicit comments on this issue. Given the discrepancy between interview and questionnaire results, this reported area of change should be considered cautiously.

The next most commonly reported change in the behavior of the families attending Messy Church involved an increase in prayer. During the study, 47 percent of the families reported this. As with the first three reported areas of change, there was strong agreement between interview data and questionnaire data on this issue.

The following excerpts, from two different families, describe two of the ways prayer is increasing in the lives of these families. One de-churched mother said, “Since coming, the kids are reminding me more about praying. . . . They do remind me . . . [and] will say, ‘Mommy we haven’t prayed in a while’. . . . Or when mom and I or the whole family is together my son likes us all holding hand and praying together. . . . it’s a big thing.” This comment highlights that in some families the children are reminding the

parents to pray. Another comment by a de-churched grandmother indicates how the practice of prayer, encouraged by families attending Messy Church, can extend to beyond those participating. She describes the following:

Before I started taking her to Messy Church we didn't say grace [at meals]. . . . I haven't been in the habit. . . . Now we all hold hands and say, "Thank you God for our food". . . . And the other day her father was over and . . . [she] was like, bouncing all around and saying "Thank you God." And he said, "What's she saying?" and he held hands too and joined in. . . . and then he said, "Oh, that's something I want to start at home too."

Interestingly, both of the above comments refer to praying at meals. To many Christians, this may seem to be a small change. However, all behavior related to faith begins somewhere. If a family can begin to pray at mealtimes or at bedtime with their children, then perhaps they also will be more likely to begin to pray in times of need or celebration.

The final change in behavior noted by the families in the study was that of increased Christian fellowship. Of the families in the study, 35 percent mentioned this as something that has increased since attending Messy Church. All of these comments related to the fellowship they experienced at Messy Church with other families. They found encouragement simply from being around other parents and grandparents who wanted to teach their children about the Bible.

The following excerpts all address some aspect of fellowship that is important to these families. In the first excerpt, the fellowship of other Christians was important to a regularly attending grandmother who wanted her grandchildren to know that what she was teaching them was not just something she alone believed. She shared this:

They get to socially interact with kids who . . . who take the Bible seriously . . . like you don't hear "that's not true" or "that couldn't happen" . . . you don't hear

that . . . and that's good for the kids because their father isn't a Christian. . . . And so sometimes they pick-up on the negative . . . like "The Bible isn't real" . . . or "People just made it up" . . . and so this is reinforcing to them that "Oh, it's not just grandma" . . . it's other people too . . . I mean I think they know it in their own mind but when they see their own age group.

For other families the fellowship was important simply because it gave them a sense of encouragement to be with other young families their age, who like them hoped to instill faith in their children. The following comment from a de-churched mother illustrates this. She said, "It reaffirms, as a parent, 'Oh look, they've [other parents] got the same struggles that you do. . . . And wanting the same things for their kids. . . . We're not there just to waste an hour . . . we're there to get something out of it . . . I enjoy that . . . just being with other families.'" This simple desire to be with other people of faith also was echoed by one of the attending grandmothers. She said, "There hasn't been a change in my beliefs . . . but I think it's nice to be around Christians . . . and to be encouraged by brief conversations I've had."

The above comments were positive ones about the opportunities for fellowship that Messy Church provided. However, not all families felt this to be the case. Interestingly, it was a non-churched family who sought deeper relationships to grow among the families attending Messy Church. The non-churched mother explained the following:

If there was a little more social interaction between the adults and the children. . . . like maybe if there was one day . . . rather than focusing on any of the lessons or teachings we said, "Let's just sit down and get the kids over here and talking about themselves, and just playing and interacting together. . . . and then the adults the same thing . . . this is who I am. . . . This is what I do . . . ah, this is where I live. . . . a little bit of family history . . . maybe not making it heavy in terms of faith and beliefs.

The above comment indicates that just as it can be a challenge to build friendships at Sunday church, so it can be at Messy Church. This may be a particular challenge for Messy

Church, as it is experienced at Christ Church. Since no shared meal is included, like at other Messy Church gatherings, there is less time for families to interact with one another. The fact that parents tend to be busy interacting with their children may preclude them from building meaningful relationships with other parents. For this to happen an intentional re-structuring of format or additional opportunities for fellowship need to be offered.

In summary, based on the interview and questionnaire data, participation in Messy Church seems to be an important catalyst for change in families. Increased knowledge of Scripture and talking about God together as families were the two primary changes noted by every family in the study. To a lesser degree other noted changes included worshipping together, helping people in need, and enjoying Christian fellowship.

Changes in Belonging

In addition to examining increases in Christian behaviors, the present study also explored changes in each family's sense of belonging to the Christian community. Specifically, the study examined their sense of belonging to the Messy Church community, to the parish of Christ Church, and to the broader Church. Table 9 presents changes reported by families in the area belonging.

Table 9. Changes in Sense of Belonging Reported by Attending Families

Increased Belonging to	Percentage of Families
Messy Church Community	59%
Christ Church	53%
Other church	0%
Anglican Communion	6%
Worldwide Christian Faith	26%

As Table 9 indicates, by participating in Messy Church a number of families experienced an increased sense of belonging to the Messy Church community and/or Christ Church as a parish. Interestingly, the percentages of families reporting these two changes in belonging were remarkably close in number. It had been expected that participation at Messy Church would result in a widespread sense of belonging to this particular community of people, but that was not entirely the case. Only 59 percent of the families commented about an increased sense of belonging to the Messy Church community. This may have been due to parents still forming ties with other families. Three families mentioned that while they felt connected to several members of the Messy Church leadership team they did not yet feel very connected to other families attending.

The data also showed that 53 percent of the families reported having an increased sense of belonging to the parish of Christ Church. This may have arisen simply because Messy Church gathers in the building of Christ Church, so families began to feel a great affinity with the parish. It may have developed because they became aware of events, programs, and outreach ministries happening in the parish through the monthly update provided as a take-home resource. It also may have been that by coming to Messy Church, as a form of worship offered by Christ Church, families were more open to being a part of the broader life of the parish and so sensed deeper belonging to it. Several examples of increased ties with the parish have been seen in the lives of Messy Church families

One grandmother, who for the previous three decades had no church connection, now attends Sunday church on a regular basis with her two non-churched grandchildren. One of these grandchildren joined the Christ Church children's choir. Both grandchildren

now attend Sunday school regularly, and their grandmother has joined the two-year discipleship training program for adults called Mosaic. This de-churched grandmother made the following comment about her own recent involvement at Christ Church: “I’ve got more confidence in myself. As you can tell, because I get up and read Scripture [on Sunday mornings at Christ Church]. That was a big one for me . . . and it was like ‘Oh, okay, this isn’t so bad.’ ‘Cause I’m a naturally shy person. So getting up in front of everybody and reading the first time was like . . . [sucks in breath].”

In the case of another family, the non-churched parents have asked for information about Baptism. They are considering this step for their two daughters because, in their words, they “want them to belong to a faith community.” While it is uncertain as to whether the two parents will agree about this, they sought information about Baptism and stated that if they did have their daughters baptized they would like it to happen at Christ Church. This raises interesting questions about how they view Messy Church. They do not appear to see it as a separate entity to Christ Church but as a sub-group of the parish.

One family, where parents initially were classified as de-churched, recently has been attending Sunday church several times a year. While they still would not meet this study’s standards as regular attenders, they have moved from de-churched status to marginal attenders at Sunday services. Similarly, another grandmother who was attending Sunday church on a marginal basis has increased her involvement in the broader parish by offering to help with the week-long Vacation Bible School that Christ Church offers to the neighborhood each summer. In all of the above cases, participation at Messy Church

seemed to increase various families' openness to and sense of belonging within the parish of Christ Church as a whole.

Finally, several church families in the study expressed the view that their involvement at Messy Church had deepened their sense of belonging to the worldwide Church. One church mother grew up in an Anglican home but was married to a Pentecostal and presently was attending a Pentecostal house church. She stated that it was important to her that through Messy Church her children were exposed to a different form of worship that took place in an Anglican setting. She saw this as a way to reaffirm the unity among Christians. Similarly, two Seventh-day Adventist grandmothers commented that by participating in Messy Church they had a greater sense of the shared Christian faith across denominations.

Change in Beliefs

Just as the present study was interested in changes in behavior and belonging among families attending Messy Church, it also examined changes in beliefs reported by these families. The study was particularly interested to know if Christian beliefs, such as those stipulated in historic Creeds (such as the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds) would emerge in the interview data. This would include statements of belief in God as Father, the Creator; in Jesus His Son and Lord; in the Holy Spirit; in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church; in the forgiveness of sins; or in the resurrection of the body or life everlasting. Table 10 indicates changes, and lack of changes, reported in beliefs.

Table 10. Changes in Beliefs Reported Among Attending Families

Increased Beliefs	Percentage of Families
Reality of God	24%
Eternal Life	24%
Applicability of Christian teachings	12%
Overall strengthening	35%
No change among adults	47%

Perhaps the most striking finding listed in the above table is that while high percentages of families reported increases in Christian behaviors, and in belonging to the Christian community, almost half of the participating adults (47 percent) reported no change in their beliefs. This may be due to the fact that by adulthood their beliefs are less changeable than are behaviors and sense of belonging. It also may have to do with the focus of Messy Church activities being geared to children. Perhaps the teaching at Messy Church is not adult-focused enough to bring about change in the belief of many adults. The lack of change in beliefs also may be related to these adults already having well-formed Christian beliefs, despite many of them participating in Sunday church only marginally or not at all.

As Table 10 indicates, those adults that did comment on changes in beliefs, either among their children or themselves, reported these changes to have occurred in four areas of belief. These included the reality of God (reported in 24 percent of families), eternal life (24 percent), and the applicability of Christian teachings to everyday life (12 percent). It also encompassed an overall strengthening of their beliefs as Christians (35 percent).

The following excerpts from various families' interview transcripts relate to one or more of these areas of belief. The first of these excerpts was made by a mother with no church background.

A change in my beliefs? Hmmmm. . . . I think so, for myself . . . in terms of being more open to religion and faith. . . . Because I didn't have that when I was younger . . . so I'm more conscious of it . . . talk more of it . . . you know the family is involved in it more . . . and it's engaging and opening. . . . Because it engages conversation between us. . . . it has evoked a change.

This comment suggests a very early stage of interest in things of faith. There is no indication that this person is a fully formed Christian. Nevertheless, she has expressed that a change has been occurring as a result of participating in Messy Church. The following comment from a de-churched mother relates to a particular situation in their family life when she noticed a change in the belief of her children:

I really noticed last summer when my uncle passed away. . . . My cousin's little guy had a really hard time with it. . . . but he doesn't go to church. . . . He doesn't go to Messy Church . . . with our kids we could just explain where he was . . . he was with God . . . he's now up in heaven. . . . And they just accepted it . . . to be selfish it made it easy for us as parents. . . . They were just so open, because they already had the concept of what heaven was. . . . that there was more to life than this.

This comment reflects recognition by this mother that by participating in the worshipping community of Messy Church her children grasped the concept of eternal life. She also recognized that when children learn key religious concepts, they have direct application to life situations. Interestingly, this same concept of life after death and the applicability of Christian teachings were echoed in a second interview transcript. One regularly attending grandmother offered this comment:

My daughter, she knows the truth, but she doesn't go to church anymore . . . and my son-in-law, he doesn't really know . . . but I notice that when my grandkids [who attend Messy Church] were talking to their cousins. Their cousin, who goes to church, said, "You're going to see grandpa again. You don't have to cry." And then [the grandchildren who attend Messy Church] said. . . . "Well, at Messy Church we learned this" . . . and they were talking about the Bible . . . and it was real and they're getting that it's important for your own life and it helps you.

This grandmother's comment highlights the role that the community of faith can have in nurturing and solidifying the development of beliefs.

A third comment from interview transcripts reflected that grappling with faith questions was not just happening in the children attending Messy Church. A marginally attending mother believes it also is being nurtured in at least some of the adults. She said, "I guess I'm seeing it [faith] more as . . . not just a routine thing . . . it's a deeper thing. . . . Now that the kids are coming with questions I'm thinking there's more meaning to all this . . . and there's a deeper thought that goes into it." A final comment related to developing or deepening beliefs was made by another mother, who is a regular attender. This family initially attended Messy Church only but then began attending regularly on Sundays as well. Her statement indicates the spiritual growth now taking place:

I guess I'm kind of waking up . . . spiritually I guess . . . this whole thing of going to Messy Church . . . and now Christ Church on Sundays . . . is showing me that there is something more than just sitting in the pew and planning your week out . . . or saying, "Shhhh here's a red pencil for you." . . . This has been kind of like an awakening . . . and it's a bit destabilizing.

The above comments indicate that although almost half of the families participating in Messy Church did not report any change in belief among the parents or grandparents, there were just over half the families that did report changes in beliefs. These changes involved either increases in a few specific Christian beliefs or in a strengthening of their Christian beliefs overall. With so few key Christian beliefs mentioned in the interview data, it is clear that further research into a wider range of beliefs, and changes to these beliefs, would be helpful. The open-ended nature of the interview questions may not have been the best device for eliciting comments related to a variety of Christian beliefs. Parents tended

to speak about specific beliefs related to their children's understanding of the faith.

When they spoke about their own beliefs they tended to be more general in their responses.

Parents and Grandparents as Christian Educators

In addition to exploring family changes in behavior, belonging, and belief, this study also sought to explore changes in how parents and grandparents saw themselves as the Christian educators of their children and grandchildren. A question on the written questionnaire asked families to indicate factors that were "quite important" in their wanting to be a part of Messy Church. One of the possible factors listed was an increased role for them as parents in helping their children grow spiritually. Of the seventeen families, thirteen (76 percent) answered positively to this question. In the interview data, however, few families referred directly to this role. Instead they spoke more indirectly of what they were providing their children and grandchildren by bringing them to Messy Church.

One non-churched mother expressed contentment in bringing her children to Messy Church. She said, "[My husband and I are] giving our children something that we didn't have." In a similar vein, a de-churched mother saw Messy Church as a way to provide something valuable. She said, "I give my children what I got at Sunday school and youth group." Churched grandparents seem to view Messy Church as a way for them to provide their non-churched grandchildren with spiritual nurture. Churched parents commented that Messy Church was a context and format that worked for all their children, regardless of their different levels of distractibility. A de-churched mother

married to a non-Christian husband felt that, unlike Sunday church, Messy Church was a context in which she felt comfortable coming on her own with her children.

Related to the question of their role as Christian educators of their children and grandchildren was the question of whether or not they were talking more about God with these children. In every case, families responded positively to this question. This shows that although they may not recognize that they are fulfilling the role of Christian educators, they certainly demonstrate important behavior associated with teaching their children the Christian faith. In a reversal of the parent-child role, one grandmother shared how her granddaughter in her own way is educating her non-churched parents about the things she is learning at Messy Church. This regular attender said, “Yeah, well, we talk about what we do [at Messy Church] and like when they take the crafts home. . . . the last time I think it was Moses in the bulrushes . . . and so she [granddaughter] took it home and showed it to her mom and was talking about it . . . and her mom put it up on the fridge.”

The data arising from the interviews and questionnaires indicates that due to participating in Messy Church much is changing for the families. They are experiencing changes in Christian behavior, have increased knowledge of Scripture, dialogue with their children about God, and more frequently pray and worship. A majority also has experienced increases in their sense of belonging to the Messy Church community and the Christ Church parish. Finally, about half of these families have seen changes in beliefs, either among their children or themselves as adults. The largest group of these adults noted that their participation in Messy Church strengthened their beliefs as Christians. This study now will examine various implications of these findings for future missional praxis.

CHAPTER 9

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRAXIS

After a lengthy period of privilege, power, and relative stability during Christendom, the Church now is being forced to adapt to a new context in an increasingly secularized culture. It is a culture that is often dismissive or even openly hostile to the Church. This is a stressful time for churches as they struggle to discern how to minister in such a setting. With many facing a serious decline in attendance, feelings of irrelevance and even despair can arise.

In the midst of this stressful context Brueggemann, in *Mandate to Difference*, calls the Church to hope. He reminds congregations that one of the primary requirements for such hope is a community of faith and action that is open to newness, as a gift from the God who Himself is the source and agent of newness.¹ The story of the Israelites demonstrates that as God's chosen people they had to repeatedly remain open to new ways of being and acting, as they were forced to adapt to new contexts. Initially, they lived as wandering nomads. In subsequent generations they existed as slaves in Egypt, as escapees in the wilderness, as returnees in the Promised Land, and as exiles in Babylon.

¹ Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference*, 96- 97.

In each of these settings they had to learn anew how to be the people of God. Today, as the new Israel, the Church also must be open to new ways of being and acting as it adapts to a challenging new context. There are signs, in such things as the development of new forms and practices that such adaptation is happening.

Hope that the Church can make such adaptation has arisen from an understanding of how human systems survive and thrive. Systems theorists like Ervin Laszlo point to the propensity for systems to create themselves in response to the challenge of new environments.² Viewed as a living system the Church appears to be making this adaptation in the Fresh Expressions movement. New forms of worship and structures are developing, such as cell churches, skateboard churches, Goth Eucharists, and workplace churches.

Another example of such adaptation can be seen in the new ways the gospel is being shared in today's world. In *Walking with the Poor*,³ Bryant L. Myers examines several ways that the Bible is being presented today, emphasizing such things as narrative and contemplative or communal reading of the text.⁴ A third example of adaptation of the Church can be seen in the renewed interest in local mission and the connections between churches and the communities in which they are located. In *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation*,⁵ editors Tetsunao Yamamori and Rene Padilla present various authors'

² Ervin Laszlo, *A Systems View of the World* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996), 46-66.

³ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

⁴ Ibid., 229-234.

⁵ Tetsunao Yamamori and Rene Padilla, eds., *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission* (Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2004).

writings on how mission integrally relates to each church's local context. All three of these examples point to how the Church is beginning to adapt to its new context.

The present study examined a missional adaptation that shares features with each of the above three examples. It explored a particular Fresh Expression of church that uses new ways to teach the Bible and which grew from a need in the local community. Based on the study's analysis of the praxis of Messy Church, this chapter now will examine implications for new praxis. Specifically, implications for worship, discipleship, Christian education of children, and church planting within a Western context will be discussed.

Implications for Worship

The qualitative analysis of Messy Church revealed three primary findings related to worship in today's post-modern and post-Christendom context. Each of these reveals changes in the societal context and in the context of ministry. Each of the three findings also suggests needed changes in future praxis.

The first finding related to worship was that marginally attending, de-churched, or non-churched parents and grandparents often have a desire to worship with their children and grandchildren. This is evidenced in their willingness to bring those children to a multigenerational worship and learning event each month on a Saturday morning. With many other options open to them at such a time, the families in this study made their participation in Messy Church a priority. A key implication of this is that churches should not assume that because people do not attend church on Sundays they must not have faith or that they do not have their priorities in a right order.

Things like lengthier commutes and changing schedules for employment are changing the way people live. In light of the data revealed by the Messy Church evaluation and in the face of so little time for families to be together, the desire of young parents to be with their children on weekends should be seen as a worthy value. By finding out what is happening in the lives of these families, rather than making judgments about their level of faith or the correctness of their priorities, the Church may well discern many ways, on Sundays or otherwise, to connect with them. It will be important for established churches to stop dismissing those who do not attend Sunday worship. Rather, they can benefit from examining why they as a church hold certain assumptions about present forms and schedules of worship.

A second finding related to worship was that many young families and young grandparents desire a form of worship that is multigenerational, interactive, and multi-sensory. In a post-literate culture, in which learning is often highly participatory and involves both visual and auditory learning, the Church may benefit from an examination and re-shaping of its worship, learning about this from such developments as the Fresh Expressions movement. As Moore has observed, “Our Messy Church journey is not a one-way experience of the traditional church feeding and supporting the fresh expression; it is a two-way process with the newer congregation challenging the traditional preconceptions of what church has to be.”⁶

In addition to offering new forms of worship that are multigenerational and more highly interactive, established churches may need to be more intentional about

⁶ Lucy Moore, “Messy Church Is Not a Club” *Mixed Economy: The Journal of Fresh Expressions* (Autumn/Winter 2008-2009): 6.

connecting with marginally attending, de-churched, or non-churched people who do attend service at weddings, funerals, baptisms, and Christmas. This may mean incorporating more instruction into the liturgy. It also could mean intentionally shaping the sermon so that it can connect with someone unfamiliar with a specifically Christian lexicon. By intentionally paying attention to the needs of the small minority who might be exploring church on such occasions, the church may build some ties that can be subsequently strengthened.

The issue of intentionally shaping worship to recognize the needs of de-churched or non-churched people also will have implications for the celebration of Eucharist in Anglican churches throughout Western society. There are two possible approaches churches could take concerning this. The first would be to return to the Early Church's practice of Eucharist as a celebration that is intentionally exclusive of those who have not undergone rigorous catechesis followed by Baptism. The second approach would be to make Eucharist a more intentionally inclusive celebration, in which participation by everyone present is seen as a behavioral step in the conversion process for those who have become lapsed or who are not yet baptized. This no doubt will be an ongoing discussion in the broader Anglican Communion and particularly in Anglican churches in the West as they grapple with their new context. It is presently unclear as to which of these two avenues will enable mission. However, it is significant that despite its exclusive view of Eucharist the Early Church experienced one of the most fruitful periods of growth in its history.

The third and final finding of the study related to worship was that many marginally attending, de-churched, or non-churched young parents want their children to know key Bible stories and understand their application in their lives today. The primary implication of this is that churches need to seriously consider shaping their worship to focus more specifically on the ministry of the Word. In a culture that is increasingly biblically illiterate, churches will need to use many strategies to teach Scripture. This could mean incorporating into worship such things as biblical storytelling, biblical drama, children's talks focused on key Bible characters, and sermons teaching key themes of the Bible.

Despite the new possibilities for worship in a missional context, there will be significant challenges for churches seeking either to make changes to their traditional Sunday worship or to begin an entirely new form of worship. One of these relates particularly to traditional worship and involves the challenge of structuring worship services that offer meaningful inclusion to both children and adults. Achieving this balance is not easily done, particularly in congregations in which there is already a majority of adults who themselves fall into a wide age range. It may be necessary to offer multiple forms of worship. However, this solution carries with it the possibility of a severely segmented congregation.

Another challenge in the area of worship is faced by congregations delving into non-traditional forms of church. It involves how exactly to incorporate the Sacraments into worship. Primary challenges entail not only how to include the non-churched in what has been traditionally a restricted Eucharist but also how to adjust Eucharistic liturgies to make them understandable to people unfamiliar with the traditional liturgies. This task

can be daunting. Writing about the task of adapting Eucharist for the Messy Church she leads in England, Moore notes:

If we are a church, we need to celebrate the sacraments. But the Anglican Eucharistic liturgies, though much loved by traditional churchgoers, are patently unfit for people who aren't churchy. The whole sacrament needed to be taken back to grass roots and to be rewritten with these people in mind. Why would we suddenly call Jesus "Christ"? We always call him Jesus. Why would we use subjunctives? We always use every day English. Why would we suddenly burst into acclamations from a totally different part of the story? We always try to make things clear and straightforward. Why should the simple mystery of the bread and wine meal be lost in a stream of words? To us, actions and visuals speak as loudly as words. With prayer, trepidation and frustration we developed a Eucharist that turned out to be the most moving celebration we have ever had at Messy Church, and the one that provoked most response.⁷

Moore is grappling with the challenge of finding a balance between contextualization of the gospel and faithfulness to historic patterns and forms of Christian worship. This is a question with which those taking the gospel to new contexts always have grappled. While there is no easy answer, both a deep grounding in Scripture and a deep passion to reach people with the gospel should serve as trustworthy guides in the discussion.

It is clear from the findings of this study that there are many people not in traditional Anglican churches on Sundays who nevertheless would like to attend worship. Established Anglican parishes who want to reach and disciple such people will need to intentionally examine their worship practices through the eyes of this part of the population. What this study's analysis of Messy Church has revealed is that by doing so it is possible for traditional parishes to re-connect with de-churched people and to connect with non-churched people through worship.

⁷ Ibid.

Implications for Discipleship

The present study's examination of Messy Church indicated several findings related to discipleship in an Anglican parish setting. The first and most obvious of these is that it is possible for an established traditional parish to connect with and begin to disciple marginally attending, de-churched, and non-churched people. Based on a model of conversion that involves changes in behavior, belonging, and belief, this study's examination of discipleship in the Messy Church context of Christ Church, Oshawa, found changes in each of these areas. The primary implication of this finding is that even in a culture dismissive or hostile to Christianity, there are still opportunities to nurture new people as followers of Jesus. The challenge will be for traditional churches to make the connections with them that will enable such discipleship training to occur. This is unlikely to happen if Anglican churches simply continue to do what always has been done. In the Church's missional context, Anglican Christians will need to rediscover a passion to reach people with the Christian message. Without the conviction that this is at the very heart of the mission of the Church, it is unlikely that Anglican congregations will make the effort, pay the necessary cost, and take the required risks inherent in establishing experimental forms of missional ministry.

A second finding of the present study was that discipling people takes time. While there were significant changes in behavior, belonging, and belief in the study of Messy Church families, these changes did not happen instantly. A key implication for future praxis is that discipleship must start with people as they are and be intentional in growing them over a period of years. As the families in the study attended Messy Church together

and learned more of the Bible, they began to talk together more about God. Prayer also increased in several of these families. These behaviors, in addition to regular worship, giving to those in need, and personal reading of Scripture, were intentionally focused on as part of the Messy Church liturgies. Particularly in an increasingly secularized society, intentional discipleship will need to be at the heart of the mission of local congregations.

A third finding of this study of Messy Church was that involvement in an experimental and innovative form of ministry can foster not only a sense of belonging to a new form of church but also to the broader parish offering this. This indicates that established parishes should not fear that such new forms of church will drain people from their Sunday congregation. Rather, this finding implies that such new forms may lead to growing connections and possible future involvement in the broader parish. Generally, people coming to Sunday church do so because it works well for them. While some young families, for example, may find that Sunday worship does not work well for them, they may still feel a deeper sense of belonging to a parish that offers a form of worship in which they do feel they can participate.

A fourth finding in the present study was that a growth in one area of faith can lead to changes in other areas. De-churched and non-churched families who attended Messy Church regularly found that both they and their children knew the Bible better and they were talking with their children more about God. Although many of the marginally attending and de-churched adults in the study did not recognize changes in their beliefs, many reported a strengthening of belief. For several, this was related to being part of a worshipping and learning community of their peers. The implications of this finding are

that churches need to move beyond the idea of discipleship being simply the acquisition of certain knowledge of the faith. Rather a tri-fold focus on the development of Christian behaviors, a sense of belonging to the Christian community, and expanding and deepening faith in Christ all should form part of the intentional discipleship of followers of Jesus.

Despite some evidence of growth in discipleship among the participating families, there are several challenges that became evident in terms of discipleship in the Messy Church context. Each hour of Messy Church requires approximately fifteen hours of preparation. This makes it very difficult to offer this new form of church more than once a month, which seems too infrequent to build substantive relationships or to offer adequate Christian teaching. The implication of this is that when a form of church is focused on connecting with a specific group or sub-culture through worship, it may be a challenge to sufficiently meet discipleship training needs in that context alone.

Implications for Christian Education of Children

There were five key findings related to the Christian education of children arising from the present study. First, many parents and grandparents want to be involved in their children and grandchildren's spiritual development. Second, by participating with their children in a Christian worship and learning experience parents and grandparents are equipped with tools to serve as Christian educators for those children. Third, by offering such experiences and providing additional resources to families, the Church can support parents in this key role. Fourth, results of this study indicated that Christian grandparents are uniquely positioned to serve as Christian educators of their non-churched

grandchildren. Finally, the study showed that some non-churched parents want their children to learn about the Christian faith.

Implications of the above findings for future missional praxis are many. First, the church needs to examine its role in the area of the Christian education of children. Whenever possible, it should move to more of an equipping role to provide parents and grandparents with the encouragement, resources, and ongoing support for them to serve as spiritual educators within their families. With many societal factors working against people attending church even weekly, it will be crucial for the home again to be the primary place of spiritual nurture for children. Churches need to recognize and celebrate parents' ability to influence their children's spiritual development every day. Every area of parish life should be examined to see how this can be encouraged.

For example, parishes may do this by providing lending libraries with Bible story books, Christian movies, and age-appropriate Bibles. Churches also can emphasize the key role of parents by offering special events at which they might interact in special ways with their children during the Christmas or Easter seasons, Good Friday, or Ash Wednesday. Another means of support might be to incorporate teaching about the family as the primary center for spiritual nurture into preparation classes for Baptism, Christian parenting classes, and Sunday sermons. Parents should be involved in every stage of children's Christian learning, from the first Communion training to confirmation programs and youth groups. The Church needs to again recognize the family as the primary center for the spiritual influence of children.

In addition to supporting parents in their role as Christian educators, the results of the present study suggest that grandparents also need to be highlighted as key influencers in their grandchildren's spiritual development. Given the unique opportunity for grandparents to influence growing numbers of non-churched grandchildren, the Church should provide resources and support specifically for this group of people. Congregations can do this by teaching on the role of grandparents, by offering special events at which they can learn and worship with their grandchildren, and by providing them with Christian resources appropriate for children of various ages.

A final implication arising from the results of this study is that churches may be able to meet the needs of non-churched parents who want to offer their children some religious instruction. This could mean offering teaching resources and events for families, without any expectation for church participation or membership. This may be done best by moving into non-church settings such as community centers, public libraries, or after-school venues. With non-churched people comprising a larger percentage of society there will may be parents, like the non-churched parents coming to Messy Church, who feel ill-equipped to instruct their children about Christianity but who want them to have a basic understanding of this faith. Even if such parents want this for their children for literary or historical reasons, this desire provides an opportunity for a church to reach both them and their children with the good news of the gospel.

Just as a shift to re-embrace the family as the center for Christian education provides tremendous new opportunities, it comes with challenges. Many Anglican churches have long operated from a professionalized model in which clergy, Sunday

school teachers, and youth pastors are viewed as the appropriately trained Christian educators of children. Shifting from this model, to one of equipping parents and grandparents, will not be done without great intentionality. Some congregations may worry that such a shift might diminish the role of the faith community as a whole. However, with appropriate teaching about corporate worship, shared mission, and deep relational ties being central aspects of the Christian life, this need not happen. Parents and grandparents traditionally have been the key spiritual influences on children. By recognizing this, and equipping them to serve in this important role, Anglican parishes ultimately will achieve their mission to share the gospel better with the next generation.

Implications for Church Planting

Results of the present study clearly showed that by offering a new expression of church, an established parish was able to re-connect with de-churched people and connect with some non-churched people. Furthermore, this gathered community of people grew in their sense of belonging to Messy Church and their sense of being a separate worshipping community. Although many families also voiced an increased sense of belonging to the broader parish, they have formed a separate community and now constitute a fledgling church plant within an established parish.

The benefits of the Messy Church model of planting a new congregation within an established one are many. Particularly over the period of experimentation and early establishment, this sort of church plant provides strong support for the new congregation. The established parish offers use of its building and covers the normal operating costs of

heating, electricity, water, and cleaning supplies. Additionally, the established parish provides the leadership team and the initial start-up costs associated with any new form of ministry. In this model, even a small annual increase to the established church's budget can enable start-up of the new congregation. Most importantly, established parishioners provide the initial vision and ongoing prayer support for the church plant. In a context in which the purchase of land and construction of a new church building are prohibitive, the model of established churches offering a new form of church within their midst is clearly a very cost-effective and supportive approach.

A second implication of the results of this study is that by offering a new form of church, established parishes not only may form missional ties with the de-churched and non-churched, but they also may prevent marginal church attenders from becoming fully de-churched. Several marginally attending families in the study commented that they were ready to give up entirely on Sunday worship, because it was too difficult and not meaningful for them. However, by coming to Messy Church they felt they were retaining and strengthening their faith and passing it on to their children more effectively.

This suggests that established parishes need not be threatened by new forms of church in their midst. On the contrary, such churches within a church actually enable established parishes to reach people they simply would not reach otherwise. At Christ Church this has resulted in a sense of renewed hope and purpose in the parish as a whole. It invested in Messy Church as one of its missional experiments and became excited that new connections were being made with young families.

Despite the benefits of the church-within-a-church model of church planting, the model comes with challenges. One of these is that judicatory or ecclesiastical bodies do not always recognize this model of church planting. Having been focused traditionally on the construction or leasing of new church buildings, as the normative model of church planting, they may have difficulty understanding the value of the church-within-a-church model. Such bodies even may view such a model as divisive and fragmenting. Alternately, they may see the starting of a new form of church as simply another worship service in a congregation or as one more program that a parish offers. For this reason, some denominational bodies may be reluctant to allocate church-planting grants to parishes wanting to try offering a new form of church. Further education about various models of church plants will be beneficial, as many models will need to be employed in the Church's new missional context.

A second challenge for the church-within-a-church model of church planting is that it will require training and equipping for established parishes to consider new forms of worship and learning. Many parishes simply have not considered it, because they are focused on their own survival or have felt constrained by liturgical and structural norms. Often struggling with shrinking and aging congregations it has been hard for clergy or lay leaders to think of how to begin a new form of church within their parish. To enliven a new imagination amongst established parishes will take encouragement from bishops, training and resourcing by dioceses, and a renewed conviction that God is at work and can use them to bring new life to the communities in which they are located.

A third challenge for the church-within-a-church model of church planting is the broad tendency among human beings to seek quick and easy solutions to complex

problems. For this reason some parishes will look to Messy Church as a recipe to reach young families, disregarding their local situation. Others will try to add new technology or change formats of worship with the expectation that these automatically will result in more people attending Sunday worship. The challenge will be to train lay and clergy leaders to explore local needs and examine resources present in their midst. Rather than trying to apply things that have worked elsewhere, established churches need to engage with and listen to the people they hope to reach. Messy Church should not be applied as a recipe for success in connecting with young families. Rather, parishes should consider if in their context it might be a vehicle to reach people not presently being reached and then consider how it should be adapted to fit the local context. The same thoughtful process of listening and reflection should be undertaken when considering any new form of church.

As the above discussion has shown, the implications for future praxis that arise from the present qualitative analysis of Messy Church are many. Interesting questions about worship, discipleship, and church planting will continue to surface. As more research is conducted on emerging new forms of church, the Church as a whole undoubtedly will discover new ways to live out its mission in its post-Christendom context.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study showed that a monthly multigenerational worship and learning experience called Messy Church was effective in helping an established Anglican parish re-connect with de-churched people and connect with non-churched people. The evaluation of Messy Church involved a qualitative analysis of who is coming, why they are attending, and changes in behavior, belonging, and belief resulting from their participation. The primary tools for this analysis were recorded interviews with families who had attended Messy Church for at least six months and written questionnaires completed by these same families. The raw data, arising from the interviews and questionnaires, was analyzed following a procedure for content analysis that incorporates theme-based coding and interpretation.

The demographic analysis of families attending Messy Church showed that they fell into one of two groups. The majority were parents with young children. A second group was comprised of grandparents with grandchildren. In terms of their church connection, the parents tended to be marginal attenders, de-churched, or non-churched. The grandparents tended to be regularly attending or de-churched people. The majority of children participating in Messy Church were non-churched.

In terms of prior denominational connections, there was a wide diversity in the participating families. The largest percentage had some Anglican connection, with the next largest group having Roman Catholic connections. In addition to these, there were families with Seventh-day Adventist, Baptist, Pentecostal, or no prior connections. The

majority of families had no prior connection to the parish of Christ Church. An analysis of attendance records indicated that the majority of families participating in Messy Church attended regularly each month. Over the three-year period examined, overall attendance increased significantly.

The study's analysis of why these families were coming to Messy Church examined both how they first heard about this new form of church and factors that were important in their decision to attend. The largest percentage of attending families first heard about Messy Church through personal, verbal invitation. Other means of learning about it were varied and included personal letters of invitation from Christ Church, the Messy Church sign, and other means of advertisement.

The majority of families reported that they participated because Messy Church was a viable alternative to Sunday worship services, of which many had negative experiences. The key positive attractor to Messy Church was for adults and children to learn stories from the Bible in a multigenerational, age-appropriate setting. Other positive attractors included the participatory format of Messy Church, the experience of being part of a group for worship and learning, and the multi-sensory activities.

In addition to examining who attended Messy Church and why they attended, the study examined how these families were growing in the Christian faith as a result of their participation in Messy Church. In terms of changes in their behavior families reported increased knowledge of the Bible, more time spent talking with their children and grandchildren about God, more regular worship as a family, and increased prayer with their children. In terms of changes in belonging to the faith community, a majority of the

families reported a sense of belonging to the Messy Church community, and over half also reported an increased sense of belonging to the parish of Christ Church. Almost half of the adults in the study reported no changes to their religious beliefs. However, about an equal number reported increased belief, in themselves or their children, in the reality of God or eternal life, and in the applicability of Christian teachings. In addition to this, just over a third of the adults reported a strengthening of prior Christian beliefs. The above changes in behavior, belonging, and belief suggest that the participation of these families in Messy Church is furthering their faith development as disciples of Jesus.

The present study demonstrated that a new form of worship and learning was effective in forming missional connections with marginally churched, de-churched, and non-churched people. Its results, however, have implications for all churches seeking to serve God in a post-Christendom context. These include implications for worship, discipleship, the Christian education of children, and church planting in an increasingly secular society.

Participants in this evaluation of Messy Church showed that there are many people who do not attend Sunday worship services but who desire to worship God and learn more about Him. To meet the needs of these people, the Church must test new forms of worship and learning. While remaining solidly focused on God, worship in a post-literate context may need to be much more participatory, multigenerational, and multi-sensory in nature.

Discipleship in the new missional context of the Western Church will need to be more intentional, recognizing and addressing a widespread lack of any knowledge in the

broader society of the biblical story as well as key Christian teachings or Christian practices and disciplines. In this context, in which churches will minister to more non-churched people, a concerted effort to ground people in Scripture within the community of faith will be essential. This will require the Church to grapple with how to best incorporate the ministry of Word and Sacrament in its worship.

In a highly secularized society, children receive little in the way of religious instruction, and employment and recreational demands on Sundays can be expected to further erode attendance at either Sunday worship or Sunday school. In this context, it will be essential for the Church to equip and support parents as the primary Christian educators of children. By teaching parents about this key role and supporting them with helpful resources, the Church will have a much better chance of encouraging the passing on of the Christian faith to new generations. It also will be important for churches to recognize and support the role that Christian grandparents can play in the lives of their non-churched grandchildren. These children must be seen as important people to reach with the gospel message; and when their parents are de-churched or non-churched, their grandparents must be seen as key spiritual influencers. The Church will need to support these grandparents by offering creative and engaging multigenerational worship and learning opportunities as well as other resources that help them teach the faith to their grandchildren.

The main implication of the present study for church planting is that the Church should continue to explore and experiment with the church-within-a-church model of church planting. Whether starting a new form of church within or outside present church

buildings, parishes will do well to consider this cost-effective model. It allows for maximum support by an existing congregation for the nascent congregation as it develops. By starting a new congregation within an existing parish, new people can be reached with the gospel message without the burdensome start-up costs of rent, land purchases, or construction costs. Such new forms of worship and learning have the potential to connect with non-churched people who, with no church background, may find traditional forms of worship inaccessible or even incomprehensible. By offering new forms of worship, and at different times or locations, churches also may prevent a further slippage of marginally churched people into the ranks of the de-churched.

Although this study demonstrated that a new form of church can be effective in growing missional connections with the de-churched and non-churched, many important avenues for research remain. These include exploring, comparing, and evaluating how Messy Church operates in the many different contexts in which it is being offered throughout Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. In addition to this, other new forms of church, such as the various ones emerging in the Fresh Expressions movement, need to be evaluated in terms of how they are reaching people and forming them as followers of Jesus Christ. As key adaptations to the Church's post-Christendom context, these new forms of church are sure to provide great encouragement to, and further creativity in, congregations learning how to be God's people in a challenging time.

APPENDIX

MESSY CHURCH ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Messy Church Interview Questions

- (1) How did you first hear about Messy Church?
- (2) What led you to try out Messy Church for the first time?
- (3) What do you think your children like about being a part of Messy Church, and how can you tell this? Do they have anything they dislike about Messy Church?
- (4) What are some benefits *for your children* in being involved?
- (5) Do you see any benefits *for yourself* (as a parent or grandparent) in being involved in Messy Church?
- (6) Are there any hurdles to being involved?
- (7) As a result of Messy Church can you see a change in any of the following, in the life of your family:
 - a) knowledge of Bible stories
 - b) talking to your kids or grandkids about God
 - c) praying as a family
 - d) worshipping together as a family (i.e. at Messy Church, or elsewhere)
- (8) As a result of Messy Church has there been a change (e.g. strengthening, weakening, or shifts) in how you think of yourself/your family as a person/people of faith?
- (9) As a result of Messy Church has there been a change (e.g. strengthening, weakening, or shifts) in your sense of *belonging to a church family*?
- (10) As a result of Messy Church has there been any change (e.g. strengthening, weakening, or shifts) in your *beliefs*?
- (11) How helpful have you found the (a) lending resources or (b) take-home activities?
- (12) Ten years from now do you see your family being involved in a church community?
- (13) Are there any other things you'd like to say about Messy Church?

Messy Church Questionnaire

family name:

first name(s) of person/people completing the questionnaire:

your age (& spouse, if they participate in Messy Church with you):

age(s) of the child(ren) that come with you to Messy Church:

your relationship to these child(ren) i.e. parents, grandparent etc.:

- (1) What made you *first want to be a part of* Messy Church? (check any that are quite important to you)
 - ☐ worship and learning activity for us as a whole family
 - ☐ social stimulation for my child(ren)
 - ☐ increased knowledge of Bible stories for my children
 - ☐ increased knowledge of the Bible for me
 - ☐ faith development of my children
 - ☐ increased role for me as a parent in helping my children grow spiritually
 - ☐ other:
- (2) What is happening for you and your family as a *result of being a part of* Messy Church? (check any that apply)
 - ☐ better knowledge of Bible stories
 - ☐ more talking with our kids about God and faith
 - ☐ I'm growing spiritually too
 - ☐ praying with my children more
 - ☐ praying more myself
 - ☐ more regularly worshipping together as a family (i.e. once a month at Messy Church)
 - ☐ feel a part of the Messy Church family
 - ☐ feel more a part of Christ Church
 - ☐ other:
- (3) I would describe the following Christian practices, talked about at Messy Church, as important in my life, and/or the life of my family (check any that apply):
 - ☐ praying (simply talking to God)
 - ☐ learning what's in the Bible
 - ☐ teaching my children about God
 - ☐ sharing with family or friends about my faith
 - ☐ worshipping God as part of a gathering of Christians
 - ☐ helping people in need, financially or otherwise
- (4) How would you describe the church background of both you and your spouse (if they attend Messy Church). i.e. Were you a part of a church as a child, youth and/or adult, and if so in what denomination, and how involved were you?
- (5) *Prior to coming* to Messy Church how would you describe your relationship to the parish of Christ Church? (please check)
 - ☐ committed & involved member
 - ☐ frequent participant (i.e. almost every week)
 - ☐ occasional participant (i.e. most months)
 - ☐ very occasional participant (i.e. a couple of times per year)
 - ☐ no ongoing connection
 - ☐ other church connection (and frequency of involvement):
- (6) Anything else you'd like to comment on about Messy Church:

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